Folk Dance of India

By
PROJESH BANERJI

TAMIL NAD GRAMA SEVAK VIDYALAYAM.
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This is the second book by the author of *Dance of India* and is the only book on the subject. It deals comprehensively with the technique and the themes of the folk dances of India. The Illustrations greatly add to the value of the book.

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"PEACOCK" in Chow Dance
(By Courtesy of Mr. Haren Ghosh)

231

The Folk-Dance of India

By

PROJESH BANERJI

(AUTHOR OF *Dance of India*)

KITABISTAN

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49

TO

RUSTIC INDIA

PREFACE

An exhaustive work on this subject is absolutely impossible, for the very simple reason that there are always changes in the form of any particular dance from one village to another, and India being a vast country and having innumerable folk-dances, one life-time is insufficient to record them. But this book will be a guide, stimulus and a stepping-stone from which others may work on the subject. One may either take one province and try to explore all its regions for this precious art of folk-dancing ; or one may start with just one district. In this way there is a possibility of bringing to light material of great ethnological interest.

I have deliberately taken into consideration the most important folk-dances of India and have discarded the insignificant ones, not wishing to make the book unnecessarily lengthy by incorporating every detail.

I have arranged the folk-dances province-wise. The provinces are not treated according to their political boundaries, but are divided from the point of view of dance. The following chapters and consequently the dance-provinces have been arranged with due regard

to the different degrees in which they present aesthetic culture and grace.

I am greatly indebted to the late Mr. G. S. Dutt, I.C.S., who kindly helped me, by narrating the various typtoes of folk-dances prevalent in Bengal, by explaining to me the ideals of *Bratachari*,* and also by supplying the necessary literature.

My acknowledgments are due to Mr. Haren Ghosh for supplying me with the photographs of Kathakali, Chow and Manipuri dances and to my uncle, Mr. B. N. Banerji, M. A., Librarian of the Public Library, Allahabad, for lending and suggesting to me books for the work.

I am further greatly thankful to my pupil, Kumari Shail Bala, B.A., for always manœuvring me towards a speedy finish, for her kind encouragement, and for typing a portion of the manuscript.

Allahabad
June 14, 1943

PROJESH BANERJI

*See Chapter on Bengal.

5568

CONTENTS

	Page
Preface	5
Introduction	9
The Deccan	18
Assam	41
Behar and Orissa	50
Bengal	72
The Punjab, Sindh and Baluchistan	93
The United Provinces	110
The Central Provinces, Central India and Rajputana	118
Gujerat	123
Ceylon, the Andamans and the Nicobars ..	127

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

FACING PAGE

1. "Peacock"— in Chow Dance.. .. *Frontispiece*
2. "Ravana" in Kathakali Dance 29
3. Thamble Sna in Manipur Dance 41
4. Manipuri "Ras" 43
5. Ornaments of Naga Dances 48
6. "Hunter"— Chow Dance 55

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The very existence of folk-dance implies a certain complexity of development in the social order; and also even by its name, implies a distinction based more or less roughly on this complexity, whereby the ruder arts of the less cultured members of society are distinguished from the more sophisticated arts of the educated classes. In a primitive community the whole body of persons comprising it, is the 'folk' and in the best sense of the word it might be applied to the entire population of any community. In its common application, however, in such compounds as 'folk-lore', 'folk-music', etc., it is narrowed down to include only those who are mainly outside the current of urban culture and systematic education, the unlettered or little-lettered inhabitants of village and countryside.

In a simple community, where all dancing is of the folk, this distinction between the art of the poor peasant and his more educated brethren only arises when, with social progress, art-forms split away, developing a self-conscious technique and becoming the province of a profession, and of the cultured. We may say that

folk-dancing is that dancing which has developed among the peasantry, and is maintained by them in a fluid tradition without the aid of the professional dancer, teacher or artist; and is not, at least in its particular form, observed and practised in towns on the stage, or in the ball-room.

There is, however, as marked a distinction between folk-dancing and primitive dancing, as there is between folk-dancing and the refined classical dancing of more cultured people. Unlike classical dance, folk-dance was made for the sheer pleasure of the performers, and not for the entertainment of the public; while the primitive and aboriginal dancing was nothing but a spontaneous and emotional rhythmic expression preparatory to a ritual or battle. Folk-dance, with the progress of civilisation has developed from aboriginal dancing, and this less primitive form of dance discards much of the spontaneity, crudeness and the occasional indecency of the other. Nevertheless, primitive dance was the foundation of folk-dance; and folk-dance was the foundation of the refined forms. Refined dance when degenerate re-enters the category of folk-dance, just as folk-dance with culture and development ascends to that of refined dance.

Emotion as expressed in the classical dance of the stage is artificial; whereas in folk-dance it is original and natural. As man becomes civilised and enlightened,

and therefore more conscious of his "Self", shyness assails him, driving away simplicity. This can easily be detected by a comparison of children with adults. Children are less "self-conscious" and, therefore, more free from that shyness of expressing emotions, which comes with age and culture. Similarly there is a correspondingly less free play and expression of emotion in folk-dance than in that of thoroughly primitive peoples.

Folk-dance is of great national importance and aesthetic value. There is quite a lot of truth in Washington Irving's remark that the character of a people is often to be learnt from their amusements; "for in the hour of mirth, the mind is unrestrained and takes its natural bent". And so it may not be too much to say that progress in the art of dancing reflects a progress in civilisation; and that to record the advance made by any nation in this art is to record its approach towards refinement. The folk-dancing of a nation is the nation's mirror, in that it manifests to some extent the nation's temperament, art, culture, simplicity, social status, customs and creed.

Although one must necessarily place rural art in a lower scale of value, both culturally and artistically, than the more sophisticated forms which have acquired the appellation of "classic art"; a more intimate acquaintance with, and a correct appreciation of the rural arts

of India will reveal the fact that in their own way they display a profundity of philosophical conception, an integrity of feeling and a standard of virile and artistic expression which are in no way inferior to those found in the sophisticated forms of art and dance which have been accorded a wider notice in the art world. In some ways one may even say that the folk-dances are of an even greater significance in that they are a direct and unsophisticated expression of the innermost spirit of India.

Pastoral man, living close to Nature, andentirely dependent on her for his everyday need, is inevitably much affected by the natural phenomena of his environment. Consequently, the national and folk-dances of a country are much influenced in atmosphere and theme by these natural circumstances, as by the geographical conditions prevailng in the areas to which they belong. For instance, throughout the dances of Hawaii, there recurs a swaying movement of the hips, while the palms of the outstretched hands keep up a slow fluttering movement. The hip movement has been taken from the waving of the palm-trees by the lazy Pacific breeze, and the hand movements from the ripples of the calm sea which surrounds the Island.

This influence of natural environment on the movements of the dance is perhaps to some extent responsible for the difference between the energetic activity of the

dance of the West, with its generally exhilarating climate; and the gentler swaying movements of that of the East with its heavy atmosphere drained by the hot sun of all incentive to physcial energy.

In India, owing to the diversity of the climate and topography, characteristic peculiarities are evinced in individual Indian dances. In Manipur dance, for example, are many abrupt sittings and vigorous swayings of the upper portion of the body with the arms stretched upwards. Manipur is a mountainous country, whose hills are clad with mighty forests, subject to the violence of frequent storms, which vigorously agitate the trees and often even uproot them. The abrupt sittings symbolise the uprooting of the trees, and the agitated movement of the body from the waist upwards is a figure of the swaying of the trees.

One finds the dances of the plains comparatively much milder in expression than those of the hilly places or of regions abounding in jungle, or subject to cold. There are dances among the jungle tribes, in which the dominant feature is the enactment of the roles of tigers, wolves and elephants; the presence of these beasts being a perpetual influence in the minds of people whose whole lives are passed in an ever-watchful endeavour to protect themselves and their animals from the onslaught of their less peaceful fellow-denizens of the jungle.

The influence of the folk-dance may be seen today in the vestigial movements from it that persist in certain social and religious ceremonies. These have become very little more than simple ritualistic gestures accompanied by solemn walking instead of the rhythmic strikings of the hands and feet as in the distant past, when these ceremonies were formulated. For example, in the "Barana" ceremony of the bridegroom, when he is received by the bride's parents, he is first met by the mother of the bride, who bears aloft a large brass plate with symbolic gifts of fruit and flowers, which she offers to him during her solemn seven-fold encirclement of the place where he stands. After this a procession of seven married women makes seven circuits of the groom, carrying other symbols of prosperity, happiness, divine blessing, etc.

There are also found dances akin to the Indian ones in various other parts of the world which does seem to point to the fact that the people of other countries suffered similar reactions to the fundamental things in their lives, and interpreted them similarly through the medium of their dancing, for example, the masked dances of the Aleutian Islands, Alaska, Tibet, Kamschatka, and Africa; the religious dances of Bali; and the social dances of Mexico. The arts of these people developed during the ages, resembling each other closely in many ways, and yet, of course, quite unaffected by each other;

as there is not necessarily any definite ethnological link between these countries.

Uday Shankar rightly points out that every Indian is a dancer. Eighty-five per cent of the Indian population consists of the peasantry, and a correspondingly high proportion of the country's choreographic art is kept alive in the villages and countryside. It is evident from the movements of the villagers, especially the women, that their gait is by nature graceful, and this grace can be best exemplified in the everyday scenes of village life; where the peasant girl carries a pitcher of water on her head with the stately ease of a queen; or swings along with a lithe, free movement from the waist, in no way hampered by the child astride her hip; and since all village women adorn their feet with jingling anklets, the rhythm of the dance is called to mind most vividly as they move gracefully about their daily tasks; wholly unconscious of the loveliness of their easy and statuesque poise.

The peasant has an instinctive knowledge of rhythm, and his simple orchestra includes innumerable time-giving instruments of diverse shapes and sizes, which he is adept at playing, and all the village dances are accompanied by them.

Art receives its greatest inspiration from religion, whether that art be painting, architecture, literature, music or dancing. It may be that in the West, modern

dancing has little, if any religious inspiration; but this is not the case in India. Religion is the background here. One finds that the dance themes mostly depict scenes or episodes from the stories of mythology and scripture.

Before attempting to make any distinctive classification of the indigenous folk-dances of India, it may be noted at the outset, that they can roughly be divided into two broad classes, viz., the women's dances and the men's dances. The sexes do not generally take part in dancing together, except in a very few communities such as Santhals and other aboriginal tribes. The dances may then be divided into three main classes; (1) social—these being semi-religious and connected with seasonal festivals, (2) purely religious, and (3) martial. It is, however, never possible to place a particular dance exclusively in any one of these main classes, as most dances, though predominantly religious or social, bear many traces of other themes.

It is difficult to draw the line between social and ceremonial dances. To assign, as is sometimes done, a religious origin to social dancing as a whole, seems in the face of the evidence, dangerous; for the folk-lorist is well aware that that which is serious ritual in one generation may become merely the adult amusement of the next, and perhaps even the children's game of the phase following.

Though there is evidence of borrowing from ceremonial sources in some social types of dance, it would be incautious, when considering this subject, to forget that man's impulse to amusement is general and early; and thence to read symbolism into obvious actions of the body, into the natural formations of which a number of dance movements may fall.

Most of those dances, originally seasonal or ceremonial have in many cases become little more than a casual periodic diversion and show, but they still retain sufficient of their early character from which inferences about their origin may be drawn. The festivals and ceremonies with which they are now linked, are also to some extent another clue as to their pristine significance; however much the performers themselves may have forgotten about their meanings. Dances belonging to the third category, those martial or heroic in character, are not so widespread except among the tribesmen of the remote hills and the forests; but one may still come across these here and there; now very mild in their bellicosity; and again little more than an almost forgotten memory of those choreographic stimuli for war which aroused the blood lust of their early forefathers.

CHAPTER II

THE DECCAN

In this chapter will be considered all those dance forms current among the communities of South India, from the Vindhya mountains to the southern-most tip of the Peninsula; including that strip of land to the East of the Western Ghats extending from Bombay to Cape Comorin. In this area with its older civilisation, derived from the Dravidian culture of pre-Aryan times, a more conservative people have preserved their ancient customs uninfluenced by the currents of modern thought.

The Deccan is the home of a number of styles of dancing; and mythology and history offer ample evidence, in legend and in fact, to show that dancing was by no means an unknown art to the people inhabiting these regions as far back as earliest times.

Popular tradition has it that the art was first introduced here from the North. Far back in those days when the Aryan occupation was in its initial stages in Northern India, it was the practice among the rulers

there to banish those who fell from the royal favour to the still unexplored and supposedly wild South. Thus the hero-god Rama was forced to wander South; and the Pandava brothers, heroes of the ancient epic, the Mahabharata, likewise took refuge there, when they lost their wealth and kingdom to a cousin in a tournament of dice-play. And it is in connection with this legend that we first hear of the origin of the art of dancing in the Deccan; for there is a story prevalent even now among the people of Mangalore that the classical "Bharata Natya" (lit. Dance of India) was first taught there by one of these royal brothers. The story relates that these five Pandava brothers, ashamed of their ignominious defeat, went disguised as humble folk to the court of King Virata, whose ancient kingdom of Matsya-Desha was situated in Central India to the south of Delhi. Here they sought work, and the third and most splendid of the five, Arjuna, in the guise of a female dancing teacher, was commissioned to instruct Virata's daughter in this art. As far as the story goes the art received wide appreciation in this kingdom and from there spread further south until it was known throughout the Deccan which to this day has remained the home of the pure dance form—Bharata Natya.

Another common legend tells how later in life, after his rehabilitation in his own kingdom, this accomplished hero travelled as a pilgrim as far south as the

Mahendra hills and came to the city of Manipur. Manipur, or Manikapattam of the Mahabharata was a seaport at the mouth of Lake Chilka, and once the capital of Kalinga. Chitrabhanu, its king, had a daughter named Chitrangada, an accomplished girl, talented as an artist. It is conjectured that Arjuna, himself a lover of music and painting and dance artist *par excellence*, was attracted by Chitrangada's artistic temperament, and so taught her the art of dancing; and from this court it was spread throughout the length and breadth of the Deccan.

Still another of these old legends deals with this same subject. One of the wives of Arjuna was Ulupi, the daughter of Pundȧrika, who ruled over the kingdom of Nagaloka in Patala (south). Now according to ancient lore all creation is divided into three regions—the upper region or heaven; the middle region or earth; and the lower regions, called Patala; the whole being upheld by the hood of a huge serpent or "naga". Thus the floor of Patala—the lower region was the head of the "naga," and since it was a region of torment was inhabited by venomous snakes, fire, etc. It seems that this myth has in the instance of this story been taken as an analogy, whereby the three regions of creation are symbolised by the Himalayas for the higher regions, Hindustan for the middle region, the Deccan with its little known forests and jungles for the lower region or Patala; and so Arjuna is

supposed to have taught the arts of music and dancing to Ulupi who thus charmed into submission the Nagaloka, or fearsome inhabitants of her father's dread kingdom.

Later, after the dark periods of myth and legend, one finds during the Buddhist period of history scattered references to the existence and development of the art of dancing; for instance, there exists a brief reference to Ambapata, a famous dancer at the court of Visala, and then of her successor, Salawati;[1] and also there is an inscription of the Chalukya dynasty of Badami, early in the eighth century, which records gifts made by a dancer to a temple.[2]

Then later on, after the decline of Buddhism, and contemporary with the revival of Hinduism, history tells us that the dynasty of Hoysala Ballalas, who held supreme sway in Mysore from about 1000 to 1300 A.D., erected several temples or groups of temples, to the newly popular religion. Among these, the famous temple at Belur owed its origin to the building enthusiasm of Vishnuvardhan, the last and greatest of this line, whose activities were brought to an end before his greatest temple reached completion, when the kingdom suffered the Mohammedan invasion of 1310 A.D.

[1] R. S. Hardy. "A Manual of Buddhism," London, 1853 p. 244.

[2] B. G. I Pt. II (1896) 372,394.

In this temple, a Mahamandap, or big platform of black marble, where she could dance before the gods, was erected by Vishnuvardhan for his queen, Nritya Saraswati. Queen Nritya Saraswati was famed as the foremost dancer of her time, and crowds were thrilled by her exquisitely executed movements and poses, as she performed on the great smooth circular slab of black marble before the presiding Vaishnavite deity of this sacred theatre, Chenna Kesava.

The Deccan is famous for its many temples with similar Mahamandaps or dancing platforms, on which later the Devadasis danced before the gods in order to please and propitiate them. In Kolaba, instead of a platform, there is a dancing girls' palace known as Kalavanti Chaveda, where formerly ceremonial dances were performed.

Folk-dancing in the Deccan remains unexplained if the art, customs and life of the Devadasis are not dealt with. They played an important role not only in the Deccan, but in every part of the country. Most of the refined and classic forms of dance known today were preserved in their pure form by the temple Devadasis. But in so far as their art has any important significance in a study of folk-dancing, it should be remembered that the development of tribal dancing into folk-dancing, and of folk-dancing into the highly stylised classic form, and then the degeneration of that again into the ruder

forms, with innumerable and indefinable intermediate grades, is an endless cycle ; so that while in some few temples the art of the Devadasis was pure Bharata Natya, in many others it was practised in less refined forms which were often taken from locally prevailing folk-dances. There was, in the course of time, a continual interchange of movement and gesture between the various types of dance but the Devadasis, as an officially established and supported class of dancers, became the depository of much that might have otherwise been lost to the art of dancing and were also an energetic force in society to keep alive its dance traditions and to continually impregnate it with new enthusiasm and ideals.

The rise of the dancing caste and its somewhat euphemistic name (Devadasi—servant of God) seems to date from the ninth and tenth centuries A.D., during which time most of the temples were built in South India. The dancing girls' duties were to fan the idol with palm-leaf fans or Tibetan ox-tails, to carry the sacred light called Kumbarti, and to sing and dance before the deity when it was carried in procession.

Inscriptions show[1] that in A.D. 1001, the great temple of the Chola King, Rajaraja of Tanjore, had attached to it four hundred "talic cheri pendugal" or "women of the

1 "South Indian Inscriptions" ed. E. Hutzsh, Madras (1890-1903) ii pt. iii, p. 259.

temple", who lived in free quarters in the four streets surrounding it, and were allowed tax-free land out of its endowments. Other temples had similar arrangements. At the beginning of the last century there were one hundred dancing girls attached to the great temple at Conjeeveram;[1] and at Madura, Conjeeveram and Tanjore there are still numbers of them who received allowances from the endowments of the big temples of those places. In former days, the profession was supported not only by the temple, but also by the State.

Broadly speaking, temple servants and temple dancers belong to more or less the same class, and they each practise similar rites and customs, although technically there are some slight differences of caste. Temple servants, however, consist mostly of the males of the community, whereas temple dancers are invariably women.

Though the system of Devadasis in Hindu temples has been officially abolished by provincial legislation for the last fourteen years; and although they now rarely dance publicly in any of the great temples, they still follow all their old customs and ways of living. Today they officiate only in the villages where they are to be seen at festivals and social ceremonies.

[1] F. Buchanan, "Journey from Madras," London, 1807 i 12f.

In the past, a dancer was sometimes known to attain to great power and influence, such as the famous temple dancer of Ujjain, Devadatta, spoken of at length by the historian, Samadeva. In their decline, however, temple dancers fell into great disrepute with the better class Hindus, on account of the general corruption that became prevalent among them, and were regarded as beings quite outside the pale of decent society, although their services in the temple were countenanced and even considered necessary.

Abdul Razzak, a Turkish ambassador to the court of Vizianagar in the 15th. century, described women of this class living in state-controlled institutions, the revenue from which went towards the upkeep of the police. A similar account of the State regulations concerning dancers at Golconda, is given by J.B. Tavernier.[1] A system of sacred prostitution and maintenance of dancing girls in temples was prevalent in many other countries, and especially those countries under Greek or Egyptian influence, and mainly in connection with the cults of Adonis, Venus, Attis and Osiris.

Among the folk-dances seen today in the Deccan, Kathakali is the one that has reached the highest degree of development; so much so, that the country's greatest exponents of classical dancing have shown a keen interest

[1] "Travels in India" ed. V. Ball, London (1889) i 157f.

in it, even to the extent of themselves becoming masters of it, and presenting examples of it as part of their regular public performances.

It belongs to the category of religious dances, and is worthy of some detailed mention here, since this form of the art together with the Manipuri dances of Assam are undoubtedly far and away much above the level of all the other forms of folk-dance in this country.

The Kathakali type of dance is performed with variations in almost every part of the Deccan, but belongs most truly to Malabar. There has lately been a great revival of this highly developed folk-dance; and in its natural setting this choreographic drama is performed by itinerant troupes of dancers who are usually Brahmins and Amalavasis. These troupes are patronised, and their performances are sponsored by the rulers and rich landed families.

The theme of the dance depicts mostly events from the great religious epics, the Ramayana and Mahabharata. The meaning of the word Kathakali is "Story-dance", the story being told by wonderfully eloquent miming.

A troupe consists of about twelve actors, all men, the roles of women being played by boys. Musicians, singers and drummers form the orchestra, which is composed of the percussion instruments, so important in giving the rythmic patterns of the music, mainly the "Chenda, a big cylindrical drum, which is hung from

the neck of the drummer and gives a shrill sound; the "Muddalam", a small drum which is played by the fingers with the help of the "Angulimukhatra" (thimble); the "Chengalam" (gongs); and "Elathalam", a pair of big cymbals: and these are supplied with melody by the strings and wind instruments.

A Kathakali dance performance is continued throughout a whole night. From sunset till about nine or ten o'clock the approaching performance is proclaimed for miles around by the incessant and hypnotic rhythms of the huge temple drum, after which the full orchestra begins its overture on a stage conventionally facing south, and lit with an enormous lamp holding perhaps as much as twenty seers of oil. After this overture the chorus begins, the wording of which is supposed to be in Sanskrit slokas, but is often a mixture of Sanskrit and Malayalam; then the curtain, "Trishila," which is beautifully decorated, is removed. The dancers appear, and dance with the accompaniment of chorus and orchestra. The chorus is sung to invoke the gods and goddesses and after this invocation, known as "Totayam" follows the "Vandana Slogam" in praise of the gods.

Then the chief dancer enters the stage and begins the main theme, of which the motif is generally the depicture of the triumph of holy over evil. His first movements are a display of rhythmic eye movements

"Notam Kalasam" followed by "Nila Padam", or the rhythmic movements of the eyes, hands, feet and the body as a harmonious whole. During this exposition of the main theme by the chief dancer, the singers and the musicians of the chorus and orchestra are given full scope to show their skill.

The dress and make-up of Kathakali dancers is very peculiar and most interesting. Often the dancers are masked, "Mudi"; or else use a great deal of paint on their faces in order to obliterate the natural expressions, and to impose the conventional countenances of the characters portrayed.

The basic costume of all the players consists of a simple long-sleeved tunic over which are worn the traditional accoutrements peculiar to each character; and by which the members of the audience can readily recognise their identities. For warriors and heroes, for example, there are various pieces of armour-breast-plates, shields, swords, quivers of arrows and all the other paraphernalia of war; and for kings and gods, elaborate and gorgeous ornaments; and so on, each type of character wearing the conventional trappings of his role. Every player, of course, wears a talisman whereby malicious spirits are kept at bay; and a wealth of incidental adornment in the form of ear-rings, flower-garlands, head-dresses; and also the 'Keyur', extensions made of silver for the finger-nails. All

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"RAVANA" in Kathakali Dance
(By Courtesy of Mr. Haren Ghosh)

these decorations are made in varying degrees of ornaments to correspond with the degree of nobility of the characters.

Even more important than the variations in the costume, is the form of the facial make-up. This is put on according to strictly conventional canons and has become so highly stylised as to give immediate and full information regarding the whole character portrayed by the wearer; whether he be god, demon, king, *rishi* (sage) or warrior.

Actually there are four main classifications of the players' characters:—

(1) *Full Satwa*—individuals renowned for their sanctity, and detachment from material interests.

(2) *Satwa Rajas*—holy kings, most of whom are accorded the rank of deity in the epic legends.

(3) *Rajas*—worldly rulers, or any other powerful but meanly ambitious men.

(4) *Tamas*—This class includes attendants, and almost every other character of minor importance. For these four classes there are the following basic distinguishing facial make-ups; which carry on the ancient traditional form, and of which variations are rarely permissible.

1. *Full Satwa*—Red and yellow powders are applied to the face, and over these various white dots are superimposed to encircle the eyes and eye-brows. The line

of the eye-brows, and the eyes themselves are accentuated by the application of 'Kajjwal' (collyrium). The whites of the eyes are touched with a seed which stains them blood-red; and the lips are also painted red. Various "Tilaka" (distinctive caste-marks on the forehead) denote Rishis, Brahmins and holy women.

2. *Satwa Rajas*—The face is coloured green with raised white lines made by means of ground rice. Such a line running from the chin and along the jaw towards the cheek denotes the noble and lofty-minded hero-gods such as Rama, Krishna, the Pandava brothers, etc.

3. *Rajas*—The forehead is painted with an upright blade-shaped "tilaka," known as 'katti' (knife). The nose is painted red and the upper lip is adorned with prominent moustaches of ground rice. On the forehead, close to the bridge of nose are worn two prominent dots, also of ground rice. This make-up instantly classifies the wearer as a character of undauntable ruthlessness, e.g., Ravana, Kichaka, Hirnyakashipu, etc.

4. *Tamas*—There are three official types of costume and make-up used in this category, according to the dominant colour of which, the status of the character is indicated.

a. White—The main features of this are a fleecy upper garment and white head-dress with plenty of artificial white hair, meant for Hanuman, king of the monkey tribes, and faithful helper of Rama.

b. Red—The face and beard, in addition to the garments are coloured red, while black is used on the chin, lips, and round the eyes. This rather fearsome effect is heightened by the small pieces of paper that are sometimes pasted along the nose and cheeks. This make-up is used by those who play the parts of Bali, Dushashan, Kalki, and Sugreeva.[1]

c. Black—A black upper garment is worn and strings of black beads. Kali, Kirata and Mahadeva[2] in the disguise of Kirata wear this dress. Mahadeva in the disguise of Kirata is distinguishable from the true Kirata by the emblem of the crescent moon which he wears in his hair. This emblem is always associated with Mahadeva.

In addition to the above make-ups there are many other ways of painting the face and body in order to depict serpents, birds, deformed persons, court-jesters, etc.

The "kireeta", (head-dress or crown) in Kathakali is an important clue to the identity of the character, and is of two kinds; the first being a tall conical cap with a circular disc or halo attached at the back. The size of the disc varies according to the high or low status of the person who is being portrayed, so that in spite

[1] *Bali*—King of chimpanzees in *Ramayana*.
Dushashan—Younger brother of King Duryodhana in *Mahabharata*.
Kalki—One of the incarnations of the creator.
Sugreeva —Brother of Bali.

[2] *Kali*—The last incarnation of creator.
Kirata—A demon.

of the similarity of the dress of the five Pandava brothers, they can each be separately identified, by the audience according to the difference in the sizes of their discs. The other kind of head-dress is simply the conical cap without the halo, and this is known as the "muti". Various additions to this further help to distinguish different characters. False matted locks of hair, (*jata*) made from dyed jute, signify a *rishi* or sage; a tuft of peacock feathers, Lord Krishna; while a smaller round white cap with silver tassels is reserved for the use of Hanuman (monkey-God).

In Trichinopoly, is held a festival which continues during a whole fortnight every year, beginning on Kartigai day; and celebrated with much singing, dancing and dramatic representation of the old and popular theme, the eternal triumph of good over evil. In this case, the story through which the moral is driven home is the one of Kama and Shiva. Kama, the equivalent of Eros in the Hindu pantheon, is said to have been a continual source of disturbance to Shiva, the ascetic, in his contemplations; and in his rage, Shiva burnt up Kama with the fiery rays of his rarely-opened right eye. This third eye of Shiva is considered the everlasting instrument in the destruction of evil. However, Shiva's wrath was dissipated by the ardent prayers of Kama's wife, Rati, and he was prevailed upon to restore the disintegrated Kama to his former state.

On the first day of this festive season, bonfires are lit, and all houses are illuminated with innumerable little oil lamps, but during the ensuing days the celebrants become divided into two factions and feeling runs high as to whether Kama was in actual fact burnt up or not. No one seems to know the origin of this strange uncertainty, but it provides a very lively opportunity for much argument, which not infrequently ends in physical combat, which puts an abrupt end to the dances with which the feast is officially celebrated.

An interesting custom in connection with the Kartigai celebrations is the collection of the half-burnt sticks from the bonfires. These are planted in vegetable gardens and are alleged to keep off all insect pests. It is also considered a good omen for the following harvest if the Kartigai bonfires are put out by rain.

"Kuddakuttu", or the pot-dance is a popular commemoration of Krishna's victory over Banasura. It is a pastoral idyll danced in almost every corner of the Deccan, and is believed to be the original dance which Krishna himself composed at the time of his victory.

In Vizagapatam there is a class of strolling dancers and actors, the Bhagavantulas; who have a repertory of shows based on some of the oldest stories in the Hindu scriptures; but unfortunately, the treatment of these stories has become so degenerate that they are now nearly always somewhat crude and coarse

burlesques on the lives of the village notables, with the religious story running through as a hardly distinguishable broken thread in the composition of the dance drama. This form of entertainment is now so degenerate that respectable women would never be found among its audiences; and even the ordinary professional dancing girl, who is not normally so very chary of risking her reputation, very rarely performs with a troupe of Bhagavantulas.

The stories from the Puranas (scriptures) most frequently used as a basis for these farces are (*a*) the *Samudra-manthanam* or 'churning of the ocean'. This deals with an account of Vishnu's incarnating himself as a tortoise, in which form he could offer his back as an adequate support for the mountain that was to be used as an axle in the churning of the ocean of the world, in which the ambrosia and other supernatural gifts bestowed on mankind had been lost. According to the story, the jar containing the ambrosia was brought to the surface, but was grabbed by the demons, and a conflict between the gods and the demons was imminent when Vishnu assumed the form of a beauteous nymph, Jagan-mohini, who mockingly seduced the demon hordes with promises of delivering to them alone, the ambrosia. While the demons were being misled by this vision, the gods were able to reclaim the food of their immortality.

The rough audiences of the Bhagavantula players find the interest of this last incident in the story much enhanced when a local milk-woman is brought on to the stage. She is followed by one who represents the collector of the octroi duty, who roughly demands payment of the tax; (this tax is a never-failing source of irritation to the peasant who wishes to bring his produce into an urban area to sell) and she brazenly bargains with him, offering her embraces in lieu of the tax, for which offer he, of course, falls; but she is clever enough to outwit him and the audience is overjoyed at the downfall of one holding an office which signifies any amount of petty tyranny for them.

b. The Jalakrida—the story of Krishna stealing the clothes of the bathing gopikas, the village maidens, with whom he disported himself in his pastoral, cowherd life on the banks of the Jumna.

c. Parijatam—the story in which Krishna presents the Parijata, flower of Paradise, to one of his wives, thereby exciting the jealousy of the others.

As with the *Samudramanthanam*, these ancient stories are contorted out of all recognition by this band of burlesquing mimers, and the audience of poor village men, women and children is regaled to its heart's content with exaggerated portrayals of the discomfiture and humiliation of such local tyrants as the zemindar, the tax-collector and his agents; poor consolation

to a section of the community for whom this sort of thing is the only way they have of expressing their hate of the oppression with which they are continually vexed.

The village audience rewards its entertainers with a feast provided by the head men of the village, and with a small sum of money that is collected. The theatre is any green and open place near the village; but on special occasions, such as religious festivals and marriages a temporary shelter of thatch and bamboo poles may be erected.

This kind of rustic entertainment is not unknown in other parts of India too, where a down-trodden village community, with an undeniable, if somewhat uncharitable sense of humour, loves to witness an exhibition of all the forms of degradation it could possibly wish to the unscrupulous overlords and money-lenders of an out-dated feudal system of agrarian government.

In Tanjore, girls often gather together to perform the *Kilattam Acchoponga*, a devotional dance in which they dance round a holy spot surmounted either by an idol or a votive lamp, a simple exposition of dance, following the same form as hundreds of other folk-dances wherein the dancers group themselves in a circle and move around with rhythmic steps, keeping the time in their dancing by the chanting of some hymn or lyric ; and stressing the beats with the clapping of their hands,

unless they are fortunate enough to get the services of a friendly drummer, who will also join in with a *dholak* (simple drum). According as to whether the dance be a harvest celebration, or a devotional dance such as this one, the *Acchoponga;* the timing will be more or less joyous, and the gestures will be a graceful expression, generally spontaneous, of the sentiments embodying the spirit of the dance; but the general form is common to a large number of dances.

In Malabar, though not unknown in other parts of the Deccan too, is the *Kummi* dance, following the same general lines of execution, the gestures signifying the reaping and harvesting of bountiful crops. Such too are the dances of the Lambadi women, which consist of much posturing in time to a rather monotonous chant; and also those of the people of the Trichinopoly district, men and women, whose favourite diversion is the getting-up of dance performances among themselves. Here the men and women dance in separate groups, and a party that begins at nightfall will rarely pall on the performers until the advent of another dawn.

Another example of this simplest of dance forms is often to be seen in Malabar where groups of girls dance in a circle, one intoning the verse of a favourite song, and her companions all joining in the refrain; each performer taking it in turn to sing the solo intonation, and of this simple dance they never tire until

their desire to express themselves in all shades of emotional experience through the medium of their always graceful movement, is stated.

The women of Malkanagiri and Nandapuram are very well versed in the art of folk-dancing ; again mainly in the form of those dances of which the basic figure is the circle. They dance very lightly and daintily in a ring, hands on each others' shoulders, and there is no more picturesque sight than a group of these happy maidens ; dressed almost exactly alike in their clean white saris, enlivened with borders of cerise or gay checks, which reach only half way between the knees and the ankles. They wear rings on their fingers and bells on their toes, like the lady in the Nursery Rhyme ; their graceful limbs are tattooed with formal designs from the ankles to the knees, and from the wrists to the elbows, the left fore-arms being almost entirely hidden under a score of jingling brass bangles ; and their feet loaded with chased brass anklets of considerable weight.

Their simple orchestra, consisting solely of drums, beats out a gay tattoo while the girls group themselves into the preliminary circles ; then the sound of the drums dropping to a muffled beat, each circle strings out into a long line, headed by the leaders who carry a baton of peacock feathers, with which to indicate the movements of what develops into a rhythmic 'follow-the-leader'.

Each long chain of girls dancing in perfect step, and stressing the time by the clinking of the anklets, moves along with the ease of a perfect natural grace. As they dance, the girls sing, in unison, a tuneful refrain in a minor key, ending on a sustained falling note, and weave themselves, into sinuous lines, curves, spirals, figures of eight, and back into lines again, never faltering, never missing the time; in and out like some brightly coloured snake, first slowly and decorously; then as the music of the drums quickens more and more, with more and more abandon and higher and higher steps until they can no more; and the gay and joyous chains break up amid peals of happy laughter.

In Malabar is a type of dance now rarely seen, and looked upon with a certain contempt, as it was performed by touring groups of dancing girls under the leadership of a Nattuvam; and in Malabar the public performances of dancing girls are not regarded as a correct form of entertainment. The dance performance was known as 'Mohiniyattam', and as its name implies, dealt with Vaishnavite legends concerning the heavenly temptress, Mohini.

Most war dances are a survival of a savage past, and are only practised today by the members of a few, aboriginal tribes. Only in a very few isolated parts of the world are they still used to stimulate the lust for war; and wherever they survive in India, they are very

mild affairs indeed. Sometimes, one may come across members of the Bhil tribe indulging in one of these unwarlike performances, at Dohad in the Bombay Presidency, with interested spectators peacefully watching a scene in which the weapons carried by the dancers, are the only clue pointing to a distant and bloodthirsty past.

Other aboriginals priding themselves on their dancing skill are the Khonds and Savaras, but in comparison with the delightful movements of so many village dances, their efforts are at best little more than clumsy stampings in time, in some tribes the women standing in a bunch in the middle, while their men-folk hop round them in an irregular circle, jingling their anklets and shaking their arms.

In the Godavari district, shows of puppets and marionettes are greatly appreciated by the people of the countryside. While such performances do not strictly belong to a survey of folk-dancing, they are certainly indicative of the highly developed love of rhythm and movement in the hearts of the common people. Very often the puppets in these shows are concealed behind a sheet, and their shadows are made to dance on the screen thus formed, the shadows being projected on to the sheet by a crude kerosene oil-lamp at the back.

TAMIL NAD GRAMA SEVAK VIDYALAYAM
T. KALLUPPATTY POST,
MADURA DT.

THAMBLE SNA in Manipur Dance
(By Courtesy of Mr. Haren Ghosh)

CHAPTER III

ASSAM

The most important dances of Assam are those extant in the district of Manipur. As a folk-art they are highly-developed and have become well known to outside audiences on account of many Indian dancers having learnt the Manipur technique and shown it in this country.

As a folk-art the Manipuri dance is vitally alive; and every festival, whether it be religious or social, provides an occasion for dancing. Any bright moon-lit night, at any time of the year draws the young people out to dance their way from village to village, their numbers increasing as they move along.

The atmosphere of the dances is one of light-hearted freshness; combined with a youthful energy which makes them a most charming and enjoyable spectacle even to the most critical and sophisticated of beholders.

The inspiration of the Manipuri dance series is purely religious and the majority of them illustrate the romantic love-story of Radha and Krishna, and are entirely free from any suggestion of sensuality. Every village in Manipur has a temple dedicated to Krishna-

Radhika, Krishna-Balaram or Krishna-Chaitanya, and attached to the temple is a hall for the celebration in dance of episodes from the Krishna legends.

Sometimes the dancers are accompanied by a chorus of singers as well as the regular musicians. Not infrequently the dancers themselves provide their own vocal accompaniment. The costume of players, musicians and chorus is extremely beautiful and rich in colour. The female dancers wear a tight velvet bodice, the short sleeves of which are ornamented with a two-inch-band of gold thread embroidery; an extravagantly full skirt which swings above the ankles in great graceful curves, and convolutions of its endless yards. This skirt is of green or dark red silk bordered round the hem with a wide band of sequins; and tiny round, oval and square pieces of coloured mirror are sewn in scattered profusion over the whole stuff of this attractive garment.

A broad strip of white cloth is bound tightly about the waist to accentuate its fragile slimness above the wildly swirling folds of the skirt. Tucked into the waist band of the skirt and worn over it is a veil of the finest gauze-like material striped with bands of narrow silver ribbon. The sight of all this splendour is in itself a feast of beauty, particularly when in rhythmic movements, the silver, and the sequins and the bits of mirror catch and reflect sparkling light in all directions.

TAMIL NAD GRAMA SEVAK VIDYALAYAM.
T. KALLUPPATTY POST.
MADURA DT.

Manipuri "Ras"

(By Courtesy of Mr. Haren Ghosh)

The head-dress of the girl dancers consists of a small conical cap of velvet trimmed with a narrow band of pearls at the edge and having a spray of pearls hanging from the peak.

Krishna himself wears a yellow silk *dhotie* (a skirt-like garment worn by men), secured at the waist by a silk scarf with long tasselled ends. The upper part of the body is free of clothing ; but plentifully adorned with necklaces, armlets and bangles. The head-dress is a richly jewelled crown surmounted by a tuft of peacock feathers, emblem of Krishna.

A dance festival of this kind, known as Rasa-Lila goes on without a break for twelve days; accompanied and interspersed with songs from the works of celebrated Vaishnavite poets.

After the Rasa-Lila dances, the next in popular favour are the "Lai-Haroba", (literally "merry-making of the gods"). Before the conversion of the people of this country to Hinduism they were animists; and as in Burma, the old religion still flourishes side by side with the new every family having its "Imung Lai" or household god, which has been incorporated into the Hindu pantheon to be worshipped whether under its own name or under a borrowed Hindu one. The hills and valleys abound in "Laiphams" or gods' seats, which are the abodes of local deities and duly reverenced as such. The Lai Haroba dances are mostly a survival

of the ancient ritual and are an annual ceremony in which each and every village seeks to propitiate its own particular "Lai".

The dances are performed in the open space before the temple; and although the occasion is one of religious solemnity it is nevertheless marked by a good deal of merry-making and fun.

The celebrations begin with a dance offering of fruit and flowers, performed by gaily-dressed girls who are led by the "maibis", priestesses of the older religion. This having been performed, the youths select dance partners from among the girls for the ensuing entertainment. The more expert dancers assume the lead, and they dance the story of Khamba and Thaibi, the tale of the love of a poor but noble youth for a princess, a story of which there are versions in the folk-lore of every land.

The Bakasura is a dance diversion among the boys of Manipur. It represents the story of Krishna killing a malevolent crane. The crane is made in an enormous size from white cloth over a wooden framework; its fierce disposition being indicated by wicked eyes made from bundles of cloth; and two long, sharp wooden teeth. This structure is supported on the back and shoulders of one of the dancers; whose legs, well-laden with jingling anklets serve as the legs of the crane.

Most of these dances performed by the boys of Manipur are to the simple orchestral accompaniment of the "Khol" (drum) and "Khanjani" (a pair of small cymbals).

In Darang, the "Baisakh Bihu", which begins on the last day of Chaitra (April 14th) is a festival kept in honour of the New Year with much singing, dancing, and the exchanging of gifts among friends. The cattle are anointed with a mixture of oil, turmeric and rice; and then led to the nearest stream to be ceremonially bathed. The villagers go from house to house, visiting friends and relatives and taking with them presents of new clothes, flowers, fruits and sweetmeats. Also at this time of general festivity, buffalo fights are organised in the rice fields, the contests being innocuous affairs as the animals very seldom inflict any injury on each other. During this Bihu, the boys and girls organise dance parties in the fields, and experience the unusual freedom of being allowed to dance together a liberty which is not infrequently abused; so that at this season of the year runaway marriages are quite common affairs; and during the following weeks the local courts present a congested scene in which the outraged parents are seeking compensation for the abduction of their daughters.

One of the greatest festivals of the Khasi hills is the "Nongkrem" dance. This is an essential part of the ceremonies connected with the goat sacrifice

offered from time to time by the Siem of Nongkrem, (the priestess attendant on the deity); the ashes of the animal being placed on the sepulchre of the tribe to the accompaniment of solemn ritual dancing. The priestess herself leads the sacrificial procession which includes the twenty-two male dancers armed with swords and cowries; and after having officiated at the performance of the rites, the procession returns to the house of the Siem priestess and there, in her great courtyard, more dances are performed by a mixed party of girls and men; after which the men again dance alone, presenting to the eyes of the spectators a mock combat which comprises a great deal of sword-play.

The inhabitants of Sylhet, who are very fond of entertainment by dancing, have organised a system whereby the villagers may hire the services of a young Ghatu (boy-dancer) to come to their homes and dance before themselves and their friends during an evening.

The villagers of the Surma valley, being also very fond of the dance, have a delightful form of canoe-racing during which the time is set for the paddlers by one whose duty it is to stand in the middle of the boat, dancing to the accompaniment of his own voice and a pair of cymbals which he strikes himself.

A very difficult performance and one requiring long practice until a safe degree of proficiency can be attained is the *Kukri*, or knife dance. During the years of

training, young *kukri* dancers are equipped with bottles until they are capable of handling real knives. These are fastened by cords to the ends of a pole, and as the dancer gyrates he swings the pole in wild patterns about his body, nimbly timing the movements of his arms and the swayings of his shoulders to avoid the path of the rapidly coursing weapons.

The Naga hill tribes of Assam have a rich repertory of dances, mostly war-like in character, and which they perform in ceremonial dress to the accompaniment of traditional tribal chants. These chants, though associated by ancient tradition with the occasions on which they are sung, could never be explained by the singers as they are mostly in an archaic tongue not understood by any but a few elders of the tribe.

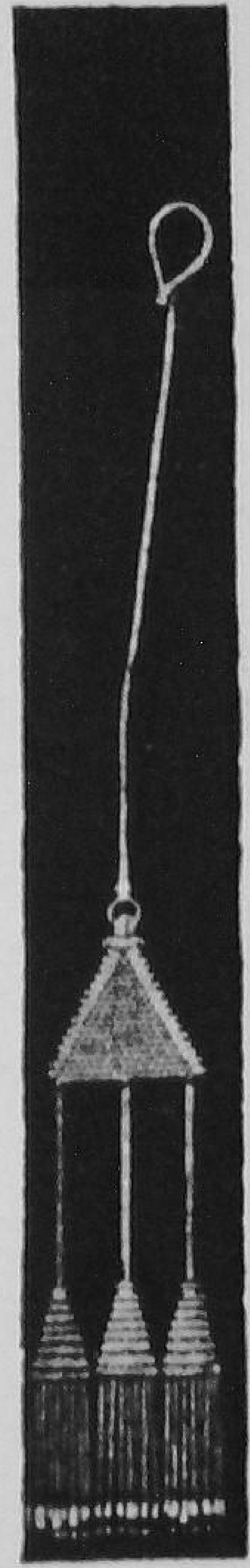
Naga warriors in ceremonial dress are a really imposing sight. They dance in the full war-paint of successful head hunters, and each year, during their spring-festival celebrations they emerge in all their ritual splendour, carrying on the left arm a plaited basket decorated with bison horns, which is supposed to contain trophies of the hunt in the form of the heads of their slain enemies, and in the left hand the spear with which their victims are killed. A number of brass ornaments hanging across the chest keeps tally of the warrior's successful expeditions after heads ; while his well-carved ornaments are evidences that he is not entirely

indifferent to the arts of peace as well. In fact, some sections of the Naga community are most highly-skilled craftsmen and their ornaments of silver, brass and iron are often very finely chased in many pleasing designs. In full dress, the Naga adorns himself with many of these trinkets,—necklaces of stone or horn, shining brass armlets and elaborately decorated brass head-dresses; in addition to the grim symbols of his hereditary calling. During one phase of the head-hunting dance, the Konyak Nagas hurl their spears in faithful representation of the actual method used to deprive their unwary victims of their skulls.

It is an interesting fact that spear-throwing seems to be the only known form of sport among these primitive inhabitants of the Assam mountain jungles.

As the festival time approaches, the little boys of a Naga village enter with great enthusiasm into the preparations for these great dance celebrations. They spend long hours copying the dress of their elders, and adapting to this end all sorts of odd materials that come their way. Part of their costume consists of the cane leg shields, plaited for them by older brothers and in careful imitation of the big hunters, they paint each others' faces with chalk and generally indulge in keen competition to outdo one another in the grandeur of their dress, and their prowess in the dance.

A



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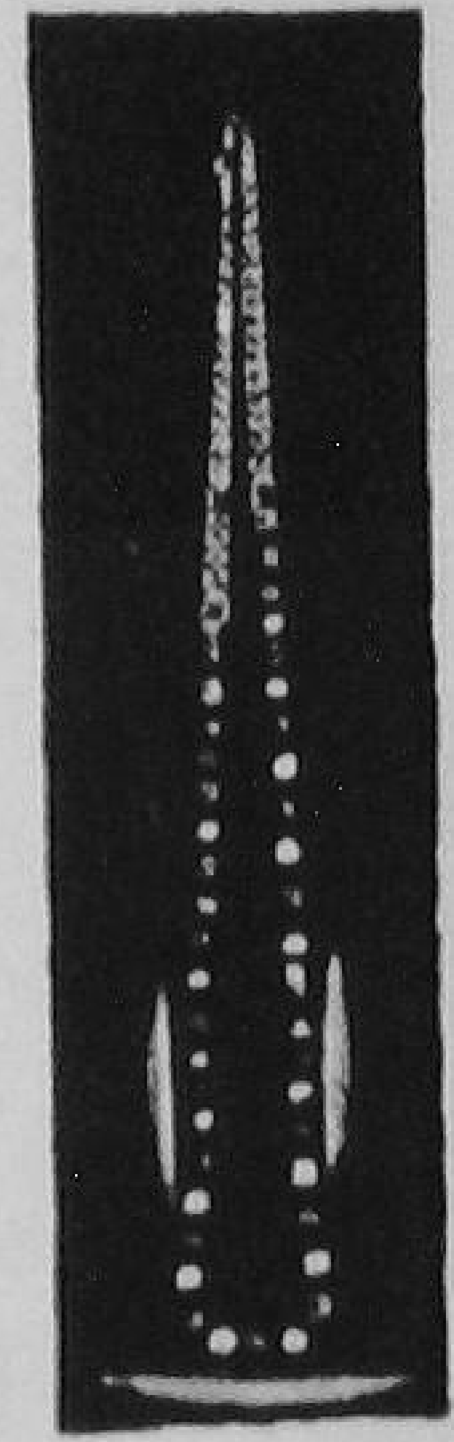

B

Ornaments of Naga Dancers
(A) Head-dress (B) Necklace (C) Ornament hanging at the back of the Crown
(By Courtesy of Mr. Pabitra Chatterji)

To the slender Naga maidens, liberally adorned with bead necklaces, brass bangles and amulets, falls the duty and privilege of dancing before the Chief's house. Here they sway hand in hand, apparently tirelessly, for hours on end, grouped on a platform of bamboos erected for this purpose.

Not all the dances of the Nagas are celebrations of the hunt, and some sects have a series of dances which are performed by the young men and girls of the community, which are very graceful in form and movement, and are accompanied by the singing of charming and simple melodies.

These aboriginal denizens of the mountains, together with the Manipuris are extremely superstitious; and practically all their ritual has as its ultimate object the placation of the innumerable spirits of the stream and jungle; all of whom are malevolent in varying degrees, and likely to work avenging mischief on the devotee who becomes at all lax in his gifts and attentions.

CHAPTER IV

BEHAR AND ORISSA

The provinces of Behar and Orissa, though not so great in area as most of the others are extremely rich in the number of dance forms that have taken root and flourished there. As Malabar has given to the country the magnificent Kathakali dances, and Assam the delightful dances of Manipur; so Orissa too has contributed one famous type of dance to our rich and varied collection. This is the *Chow* Dance, a series of dances performed each year in the month of Chaitra (April) during the Spring festival in the state of Seraikala. The dance festival proper is preceded by a three-day puja (religious rite) in the temple of Shiva; and this commences on a day deemed by the State *pundit* as one auspicious for the ruler.

The *puja* ceremonies are primarily intended to call down divine blessings on the ruler himself and his realm. The puja ceremonies are performed by thirteen *bhaktas* (devotees) representative of widely differing castes from the Brahmin down to the very least. These *bhaktas* are chosen to form the procession in which the state flag is borne from the city temple to another, also under

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the protection of Shiva situated on the river bank outside the city. A pitcher, blessed by the officiating Brahmin priests is also carried in the procession, in order that water from the sacred banks of the river may be brought back to the main temple.

Following the procession, another pitcher of water is brought from the temple on the river bank by one who, dressed as a woman, dances all the way. The pitcher he brings has been unearthed after having lain buried for a whole year in the soil of the river bank within the temple precincts. The local belief is that if the water in this pitcher does not fill it to the brim still, or is not clear, the coming year is to be a difficult one. The water in this sacred vessel, known as the *Jatra Ghat*, is afterwards used in the rites connected with the worship of Shiva, and the new pitcher of water, having been consecrated in the town temple, is then taken back to the river temple by the same procession of *bhaktas*, led by the flag of Seraikala, and is buried in place of the one that has just been dug up.

The tradition and purity of this sacred rite and the ensuing dance festival has been handed down from time immemorial and guarded with a most jealous integrity. This ceremony is repeated on each of the three nights of the *puja*, and after this the regular Chow dances begin.

The word 'chow' means simply 'mask'; and the traditional exponents of this dance adhere with the

sternest rigidity to every detail relating to its traditional performance. The State of Seraikala is also topographically so situated that outside influences have had no easy access. This is a fact of great importance, as the neighbouring States of Mayurbhanj and Nilgiri were not able to maintain their dances of this type in their pure form ; and have now altogether dispensed with the use of masks ; and with all that was characteristic of the *chow* dances.

The annual festival in Shiva's honour also coincides with the New Year of this place, and on this occasion the gates of the Maharajah's palace are thrown open to admit the dancers ; for whose art it has been extremely fortunate that the rulers have always shown a keen interest in it. The members of the royal household are not only the patrons, but also take an active part in the performance of the Chow dances ; of which the themes represent every mood and aspect of cosmic creation, as described in the heroic legends of the Hindu pantheon.

Women never take part in this performance; female roles being played by boys chosen for the beauty of their voices ; for they also sing in the chorus which accompanies the dance, besides being themselves dancers.

The training of the dancers for these performances is begun at the tender age of five years, when little boys are collected together under the tutelage of their

elders, and taught the stories of the basic legends, along with the actual pantomimic gestures of the dance, by which the stories are to be interpreted.

Each year, although the groups of dancers perform together as well as separately, there is tense rivalry between the various groups ; each striving to outdo the others by the sheer excellency of its performance. At the end of the festival, the Maharajah presents a banner to whichever party he judges to have acquitted itself with the greatest skill ; and this is kept in the possession of that group until the following year.

As the performance is due to begin, lanterns, lamps, and torches are lighted as dusk deepens, around the specially prepared ground. Thousands of people converge on this spot from far out-lying districts, threading their ways over tortuous mountain passes, weaving the paths of the dense forest, ever watchful for the leopards, tigers and bears which are continually on the prowl not four miles from the palace grounds.

At the appointed hour the weird tattoo of the drums silences the excited audience, and then the music starts, every note carried far across the still valleys during each of the five nights during which the dance continues, while the enormous audience remains rapt and silent, enchanted by the exquisite performance of the artists.

The masks worn by the dancers are made to represent the mythological characters of the legends ;

only the body and limbs must tell the whole story in a language of highly stylised gesture and symbolic pose. The masks are made of wood or papier maché ; the latter being preferred by the artists on account of their being much lighter to wear than the wooden ones. The craft of moulding masks is an ancient one, the art having been handed down from father to son through countless generations. The workmanship is excellent, and continues to maintain the high standard of artistic perfection merited by the dance actors who are to wear them and give them life.

The music for the dancing is usually provided by a chorus of singers accompanied by a *dhol* (drum) ; and of itself this music never obtrudes, but follows and reflects the mood which the dancer so impressively interprets ; though nevertheless it provided a most appropriate and satisfying background to the atmosphere evoked from the strange dim past of the epics.

It is claimed for the costumes of the dancers that these too have deep significance psychologically, and they are certainly the product of much ingenuity and skill ; especially as regards the colours which more than any other factor are held to be powerful agents in suggesting the prevalent mood of any particular dance. The materials used are splendid brocades, richly wrought with gold and silver thread embroidery, but by no means gaudy or over-ostentatious.

"HUNTER"—Chow Dance (*By Courtesy of Mr. Haren Ghosh*)

TAMIL NAD GRAMA SEVAK VIDYALAYAM.
T. KALLUPPATTY POST.
MADURA DT.

The individual dances of the series include solo, duet and group performances. Among those executed by a solo dancer, are the "Tandava" which is a frenzied expression of the divine grief of Shiva at the death of his consort Sati; the "Mayura" dance, which depicts the joy of the peacock at the arrival of the long-awaited rains; displaying his beauty and vanity as he rejoices in the life-giving freshness of the newly-bathed air, after the choking months of stifling heat that precede the rains, then the "Dhibara" dance of fishermen; the "Kuranga", a delightful exposition of the fright of the small deer during the monsoon storms in the forest; the "Sabara"or the hunter's dance, a great favourite specially when, as often happens, the dancer is almost carried away by his own enthusiasm as he joyously sights his victim, only to be disappointed when his arrows miss their mark, and then to be assailed by every possible peril of the jungle; and finally, after all his trials, when at last successful, his ecstasy knows no bounds.

One or two solo dances represent female characters; of these perhaps the best is the beautiful 'Arati', which depicts a priestess offering votive lamps before an altar. Another very fine one, calling for great skill in miming is the "Durga" dance, which shows the slaying of the demon Mahishasura by the goddess Durga. Here the dancer displays also his skill in handling the various weapons of the legend—discus, thunder bolt,

bow and arrows, sword and shield, battle-axe, lasso and spear.

Duet dances include the "Astra-dwanda", a sword dance; "Chandra-bhaga", depicting the story of the love of the sun-god for the maiden Chandrabhaga, whom he pursued with relentless ardour until, in despair she plunged into the ocean; and "Vasuki-Garuda" the victory of Garuda, the eagle-vehicle of Vishnu, over the serpent-god, Vasuki. Finally, noteworthy among the Chow duets is the Radha-Krishna dance, celebrating the eternal love motif in the characters of the divine lovers.

After his attendance of the Chow dances, Uday Shanker wrote: "The show itself was magnificent; but its effects were heightened on account of the eager faces of the children and grown-up people who just throbbed with excitement......it was a rare occasion for me to see such a fusion and harmonious blending of spirits and talents, where the yawning gulf between the dancers and the onlookers was bridged by an uninterrupted flow of the co-ordination of thoughts and feelings......How few understand today the great part played by Art in life, and how by discarding it, we cut off an important tributary from feeding our 'stream of life' ".

A dance-series of great ethnological interest which is performed by the Oraons, and is in itself a history of the social and semi-religious beliefs of a superstitious

people consists of those pantomimic representations of the symbolism in the lives of men, of the fundamental events in the course of nature.

These dances persist in Chhota Nagpur and take the form of a series of "marriage-dances", each of which is performed at that season of the year for which its imaginative symbolism stands. These marriage-dances are three in number; the 'ghostly weddings' at the beginning of the year, followed after the end of March by human weddings, after which are performed the divine weddings; when the union of Mother Earth with the sun-god is celebrated.

After the harvesting of the crops, the village women unearth the bones of the dead from the village graveyard; and these are solemnly anointed with oil and turmeric powder, as bridal couples are anointed. The bones are then carried in procession, with music, to a stone-lined pit by the side of some stream or pool, where they are to be deposited. In the procession are also carried the benedictory '*karsa*'-pot, and the '*chumka*' or lampstand, used for the blessing of the union of the souls of the more recently dead with those of their ancestors. The rice, pulses, dal, and other food-stuffs cooked on that night are left at the pit to provide a wedding feast for the Oraon denizens of the land of the dead. A dancing festival known as the *Harbori Jatra* (bone-burial) follows this wedding.

Later in the year, these ghostly weddings are followed by a dance-festival which symbolises human weddings and these dances are a joyous representation of the eternal and coquettish allurement of the female and the pursuit of the male in courtship. The main feature of these dances is the formation of lines of youths and girls advancing towards, and retreating from each other; arms interlaced, voices raised in romantic lyrics, at the termination of each of which there is a ritual chorus of sounds indicative of the deep yearning in the hearts of these supposedly love-sick young people. Drummers provide the only orchestral accompaniment to these dances, with fitting plaintive rhythms, there being often as many as seven or eight assorted drums.

At the end of the season in which human marriage is celebrated, there is a great religious feast known as the Sarhul, at which is annually celebrated the marriage of Mother Earth with the sun-god. At this time all normal weddings must be postponed, while songs are sung, dances performed and rejoicings held in honour of the divine union, symbolised by the performance of a marriage ceremony between the village priest and his wife, these two, of course, representing the Sun God and Mother Earth. Until this union has been solemnly commemorated, the Oraon may not use, or gather the vegetables, fruits or flowers of the new season. Even the manuring of the fields is forbidden, as Mother

Earth, while yet a virgin, cannot be expected to yield her bounty.

It is interesting to note that in the final dances of this series, which represent the joys of wedded life within the circle of the family, and surrounded by the all-providing bounty of Mother Earth, the sexes do not perform in separate files. The men and women are intermixed, generally being arranged in columns one behind the other, and each clasping the hand of his partner.

In the most southerly parts of the Feudatory States of this province, and almost bordering the Madras Presidency, one meets with bands of the tribe known as the Bhatras. They have a semi-religious dance-festival during the time of Holi, which seems to have lost all connection with the celebrations associated with the feast of Holi, and is nothing more than a petition to the gods for the success of their hunting expeditions.

On the festival of Holi, the men of the village go forth in a body from day-break till nightfall, on large hunting parties into the forest. On their return at night, there is general entertainment in the whole village, when the women join their menfolk in dancing and revelry, to the accompaniment of songs, alternate stanzas of which are sung by the men on one side, to be answered by the women from the other side. The

songs always open with an invocation to the crow, the fetish of the community, and call for a blessing on the morrow's hunting excursions. After this the men, in boastful stanzas relate their exploits of the day, the women providing a chorus of praise and congratulation if, in fact, the day's hunting has been successful; but if it should have been a failure, their songs are only expressive of ribald ridicule.

The festal garb of the men on these occasions consists of a short *dhotie* bound about the loins, secured by two brightly coloured strips of cloth which fall from the waist, in front and behind, to below the knees; their heads are gaily adorned with colourful turbans stuck with peacocks' feathers, and in their hands they carry short staves of bamboo, bound at the ends. As they dance they beat time by beating together these staves, and moving always by the successive breaking away of couples from the parties of four which form the basic pattern of the dance, in order to move on to form the next group of four. These dances are lively, and their patterns are pleasing to the eye. The occasion of these dances is the only time at which the Bhatras as a body give way to bacchanalian revelry, being as a rule a most industrious and sober community.

Another dance of the country, religious in character, but retaining all its religious significance, is to be found very frequently around Sambalpur, where the villagers,

all ardent devotees of the Krishna cult, gather at night for the solemn performance of the Ram-Lila dances; celebrating again the romantic idylls associated with the life of the cowherd-god.

Every village of the Orissa Feudatory States has a rich and varied repertoire of pastoral dances, which show no indication of ever having been associated with any religious ceremony or festival, as do most of the folk-dances of the country as a whole; they have sprung into being out of the sheer necessity of a rhythm-loving people to express itself in this medium. As a rule all these dances are extremely simple, but notwithstanding their simplicity, they are full of a natural grace and charm, and often embody quaint ideas springing from the social customs of the peasant communities. Each village has its village dancing ground, usually the space between the large shed used as a communal dormitory for the young boys of the village and the similar dormitory for the girls. Whenever the boys convene at this place beating their drums, the girls run out to meet them and they all spend the evening in the whole-hearted enjoyment of the dance, without undue interference on the part of fault-finding elders.

A particular section of the community known as the Bhuiyas have developed their simple village pastime into a light-hearted ritual of courtship. All those dancing parties held among the boys and girls of a village

are considered much as one might regard rehearsals, and the serious business begins, when a well-practised party of young men sets off to a neighbouring village, laden with little gifts of sweetmeats, combs for the hair and other little trinkets calculated to win the esteem of the maidens to be visited. On arrival at the village chosen for the occasion, the young men proclaim their presence on the dancing green by loudly beating on their drums and tambourines, until a large enough band of girls appears to constitute a dancing party. The offerings of the visitors are first of all gallantly presented and graciously accepted; and then the girls set to work to provide refreshments for their guests.

After the foodstuffs have been consumed, the boys and girls dance together until far into the night, and next day more than one betrothal is announced to the village elders. If, as often happens, the dancing has continued till the following dawn, the girls again offer food to the young men; after which the latter rise to depart, and still dancing and playing on their drums, they move away from the village, escorted by the girls as far as the boundary. This is usually some rock-broken rill with wooded banks; and here there is a halt, boys on one bank, girls on the other, while a valedictory song is sung; then, the song ended, the young girls courtesy to their swains, who gravely and formally bow in return, and then depart for their own village.

Not infrequently, the girls arrange clandestine return visits, when a long evening's dancing and merry-making is again enjoyed, but this time in the village of the boys.

These Bhuiya dances are very closely resembled by those of a hill tribe, the Juangs. The Juangs, however, lack the easy grace and naîveté of the Bhuiyas, so that their dances become monotonous and lifeless. Apart from the courtship dances, they have a good repertoire of animal dances, representing stories from the lives of the bear, pigeon, pig, tortoise and other wild animals with which the Juangs are familiar.

There prevails among the people of Orissa an interesting commemoration of the 'marriage-by-capture' custom, which survives in the folk-dances of many countries, particularly those of Central Europe and the Pyrenees. This Oraon version, known as the Paika dance, takes place whenever a wedding procession approaches the precincts of a village. Men array themselves as warriors, and armed with wooden swords and shields, indulge in furious mock combat, which is accompanied by dancing akin to the old tribal war-dances, at the end of which, the bride is, as if forcibly, borne away to the house of the bridegroom.

Some of the pastoral dances are simply a translation into rhythmic representation, the everyday agricultural operations of the people. These '*Karam*' dances are

extremely graceful in posture, and generally set to a slow melody composed of just a few notes of close interval, unconscious symbol of the slow but irresistible progress of Nature in the fields. As in their work among the crops, so in their dances, the men and women are not intermixed, but dance in separate groups or columns, according as the pattern of the individual dance demands. The young men at times kneel while the girls approach, and bending low over their bowed forms, sway one arm to and fro as if cutting the paddy crop. These movements seem to have a more than merely imitative intention, and there is evidence that the ritual embodies an invocation to the spirits of nature in order that an abundant harvest may be ensured. This aspect of the dance is further borne out by the fact that the young man who leads the dance carries a *chamar*, or fan made from the wild date palm leaf, which he waves over the ground as if coaxing the earth to yield in plenty. A chorus of ejaculations in a persuasive tone are uttered by the dancers at the beginning of each *karam* song, whereby Mother Earth is further supplicated to harken to the needs of her children.

During the actual harvesting of the crops the men and women work side by side in the fields, so that in that dance which represents the destruction of insect and other pests which ravage the ripened grain, men and

women no longer dance in separate groups. With no musical accompaniment other than their own voices, the dancers move in a large circular pattern, swinging sticks and clubs in representation of the killing of wild animals and thieving birds. The performance of this dance is also supposed to have some occult power whereby the protection of the crops from this particular form of disaster may be assured.

Apart from these communal dances of the Oraons, there are any number of simple dances performed by groups of young girls in lane and courtyard for no other reason than the sheer joy of dancing them; and then there are also the magic religious dances performed at marriages and known as "Benjanalua"; in fact, it is not untrue to say that there is scarcely any moment, either religious or social, at which dancing would be inopportune among these people.

Besides the Hindu peasantry of this countryside, there are many tribal communities surviving in the remoter parts, in hill and forest districts, some of whom are almost absorbed into the social and religious life of the Hindu peasant, and some of whom live much as they have always lived from the beginning of time, their religion consisting for the most part of a simple propitiation of the spirits of Nature, and generally less corrupted by a welter of superstition than the religion of the more civilised and worldly Hindu peasantry; their social

laws ruled by a rough sense of justice dispensed by the headmen of the community without the need for recourse to demoralising litigations, (of which the ordinary villager is so much a victim); their lives ordered by the necessity to produce by the rudest methods, the necessary foodstuffs for their subsistence.

These tribal peoples have their own recreations, of which dancing is naturally the most common, this satisfying their need for ritual, their love of rhythm, their desire to commemorate the exploits of their hunting expeditions, to invoke the protection of their presiding deities, and to celebrate their battle prowess, this last being little more than a memory of the wars of their ancestors.

The best known and most numerous of these aboriginal peoples is the Santhal tribe. They have developed their traditional primitive dances into graceful performances not less pleasing than the folk-dances of the Oraon village communities. The Santhals too have their courtship dances. On full-moon nights, the big drum calls to the girls of the community, who then assemble under a spreading banyan tree, their garments adorned with flowers in Spring, or feathers in Winter. Meanwhile the young men with musical instruments begin to collect in the rice-fields beyond. The girls unconcernedly continue to complete their gala toilet, chattering together, totally unmindful of the growing

impatience of their partners; until the men come forward with drum and song to demand the commencement of the dance. Then the girls form a line, linked arm in arm, in twos; and the long line approaches and recedes with much graceful swaying of the head and body. During these dance performances the girls never mix with the men; it is only after the dancing that the young people have any opportunity to mingle and talk together.

The Santhals too have their pastoral dances, representative of the gathering of indigo, the reaping of grain, and the preparation for the hunt. They also possess many dances which are purely for the amusement of the onlookers; of these, the best known is that which depicts the quarrelling of co-wives. (Polygamy is not uncommon among this tribe).

The Khonds of Angul District are another primitive community to whom the art of dancing is not unknown. The only musical instrument known to these people is the Pleka, made of two gourds attached one each end of a twelve-inch piece of bamboo, between which are extended the three strings. This instrument necessarily accompanies the love-songs of the young men, as well as every other festive occasion on which music is required. At the village dance parties, the girls, having bound about their waists lengths of brightly coloured cloth, join hands and form a circle; while the

boys form a wider circle around them; and as they dance the boys and girls sing alternately verses spontaneously composed; and quite innocent of rhyme or metre, to one of the few simple tunes that they know and the accompaniment of their three-stringed "pleka." The movements of the actual dance are equally devoid of complexity, consisting merely of the whole party moving round in a circle, swaying their bodies, and keeping time by clapping their hands and clinking their anklets. It is only the inherent grace of every movement of these lithe bodies that imparts to these simple performances the real atmosphere of dance.

High up in the hills of the Koraput District lie the villages of the Bondo-Porajas, marked by the little clusters of low grass—thatched huts standing under the jack-fruit and mango trees. In the open space in the midst of these clusters of houses are the raised platforms where the Bondo Porajas hold their dance festivals. These performances consist for the most part of spring-time celebrations, in which the dancers, consisting mostly of the women of the community, pose and step in their festal garments bearing in their arms branches of blossoming trees. At this time the women are gaily bedecked with anklets of tinkling bells, heavy brass necklets, and string upon string of little cowrie shells about their necks. These are intertwined with strings of brightly coloured glass beads, and the wrists and arms are laden with

numbers of white glass bangles. The dress of the women consists of a length of striped cotton tied about the waist and hanging to below the knees; another length of similar material being tied around the breast, with the ends left long, and floating away behind with the movements of the dance.

Among the Oraons and the aboriginal tribes of this province there are many survivals of war dances. Perhaps these have persisted to the present time simply on account of there being so many aboriginal tribes in this district whose lives have fallen very little under the influence of ordinary village Hindu life, so that their ancient customs have changed little during the course of centuries.

In the performance of the war dances, musical instruments are not used at all except for a drum by which the rhythm is marked; neither are the dancers accompanied by the chorus of singers which often replaces an orchestra in village dancing. The dancers, all male, of course, carry warlike weapons which are waved aloft with much ferocious shouting, while the men march solemnly around in a circle, now and then breaking into a run, and spreading out into long lines or columns in imitation of the formations of battle.

In some dances, as in those called 'Jatra' dances, mock fights are staged between the men of one village and another. The two parties advance into their

friendly combat carrying long poles surmounted by pennants, and brandishing sticks and clubs with such enthusiasm that one might readily infer that more serious warfare were imminent.

In the hilly districts to the north of Behar, bordering on Nepal, and peopled with races definitely akin to the Nepalees, in that their culture, language, and physical types have much that is common to the true Nepalees, one comes across various folk-dances of the pastoral or warlike kind. There are the '*tharus*', a tribe who were probably driven out of Nepal, and have now been settled for many generations in the terai or foothill regions of Behar. These are a short-statured, Mongoloid people who have a number of hunters' dances which they perform with great enthusiasm and realism, being themselves hunters. The dances are accompanied by songs, which are sung by one man, who does not himself take part in the actual dancing, the language of the songs being Nepalese. Rarely, a *dholak*, or large drum, also accompanies the dancing.

The 'Hos' of the Singhbum district, another mountain tribe, have a series of courtship dances of a very sentimental quality consisting of much slow and languid posturing. Although the dances are in themselves not highly developed, the performance of them is one of the favourite occupations of the members of the 'Hos' people.

There is also the 'Maghi' dance, quite unlike the performances of the amorous 'hos', and this consists of a joyous, harum-scarum scamper of boys and girls through the village, and even from one village to another, the dance being not unlike a very breathless and lively '*grande galope*.' One of the greater celebrations has been described by a visitor in the following words: "More than three thousand people assembled and kept up dancing and feasting for two days and nights. I was much struck with the absence of drunkenness and revelry. Nonetheless, the young men and women seemed to enjoy themselves, devoting themselves assiduously to the dance, and to the refreshments liberally provided. It was odd to see an elderly beau join in the ranks of the dancers; his blue, green and red umbrella under his arms, and his countenance as serious as that of a judge, keeping step with great precision and posing in the most grotesque attitudes". In these festivals the men act as masters of ceremonies, and the lines of girls with arms entwined suit their steps and figures to those of the men who dance in front of them.

CHAPTER V

BENGAL

In the sphere of folk-dance, until only a few years ago, the educated classes of Bengal were under the belief that no indigenous dances worth the name had been contributed by them to the synthesis of Indian culture, although they were fully aware of Bengal's rich store of folk-music and folk-song. This may have been due to the fact that the poet Rabindranath Tagore had taken from this abundance of raw material, the basis of his inimitable lyric creations ; so that only after interest in rural art had been stimulated by the work of this prolific genius, did vast numbers of people discover that all around them in the villages the art of folk-dancing had been flourishing all the time, manifesting itself in many beautiful and interesting dances, mainly religious in character, but not excluding the other themes always found in the dance of the people, namely, those dealing with love, war and pastoral subjects.

Another stimulus to the awakening of interest in the folk-dance of Bengal was provided by the work of the late Mr. G.S. Dutt, I.C.S., founder of the Bratachari Movement. He has revived this art in Bengal and intro-

duced it into a cultural movement that has become well known throughout the world. The word 'brata' signifies a solemn vow, or more loosely, an ideal; while 'chari' denotes one who strives to carry out an ideal. According to a Bratachari, life cannot be divided into separate water-tight compartments. Physical culture, for example, cannot be regarded otherwise than as inextricably bound up with the other activities of one's life, both mental, spiritual and bodily; so that according to this conception it is a mistake to pursue art for its own sake, or to pursue economic and industrial interests to the exclusion of the cultural arts of joy, which represent a deeper self-expression of the spirit. So the Bratachari movement and discipline combine in one system of training all the various aspects of human activity, and attempt to build up life as a synthetic whole.

This movement has been introduced into schools among both boys and girls, and is based on the observance of five 'bratas'—Knowledge, Diligence, Truth, Unity and Pleasure. In connection with the last of these was the art of dancing revived, and two of the set functions of Bratachari are 'Kritya' and 'Nritya' (action and dance).

The influence of this movement has been much wider than a merely local one in the country of its origin; and during recent years members have been invited by the World Congress of Faiths to London, to the

seventh World Conference of the New Education and Fellowship at Chattenham. The World Congress of Leisure Time and Recreation at Hamburg, and the World Congress of Work and Joy in Rome. The late Rai Sahib Jagadananda Rai of Shantiniketan, who was a great educationist, once wrote to the late Mr. Dutt in a letter: "It is from your writings that we have, for the first time, become aware of the fact that such beautiful indigenous dances still exist in our country."

As a matter of fact, it was even found that dances existed in various districts, that belonged to the leisure and devotional occupations of even the Brahmin women. This was certainly a big surprise to the half-sophisticated members of the upper castes, who had come to regard the pursuit of folk-art as something crude and undignified.

Noteworthy among the dances of Bengal today are those surviving at Mymensingh; mask-dances of a ritualistic character, which are performed in the open air on the occasion of the annual religious festival of Chaitra Sankranti. There are four or five dances of great popularity, and of these the most frequently performed is that representing the god Mahadev (Shiva) and the goddess Kali, to whom great devotion is paid by the people of Bengal. The costumes of these performances is of the simplest, being made by the local village artisans themselves. The village carpenter makes

the masks and the local potter paints them. As often, male roles are played by boys.

For the dance of Mahadeva, the artist puts on a common red loin cloth, the upper part of the body being kept naked except for the liberal smearing with ashes. This is the representation of Shiva as the great ascetic, and the scant clothing together with the ashes smeared on the body denote throughout India the sannyasi, or the one who has renounced the world. A double string of *rudraksha* seeds is worn about the neck, these being the Hindu version of a rosary, and on the head is worn a wig of black hair with two long matted locks hanging one on each side of the head to below the knees (for the ascetic does not cut his hair, or attend to it in any way).

The dancer takes the mask reverently in his hands and advances a few steps towards the audience, then he prostrates himself until his head rests on the ground as an act of devotional preparation to his assumption of the role of a divine being. When he has covered his head with the mask, two attendants tie the strings behind, and place in his right hand a 'trisul' (trident), and in his left a conch-shell (shanka).

The mask itself is made of mango-wood, and the surface of it is plastered with clay, which,when dry, is thickly covered with paint, white for the entire surface, and black for the delineation of the features. The

third eye of Shiva is painted on the forehead of the mask.

The dance, which is an exposition of Shiva's ascetic aspect, is accompanied by the beating of the '*dhak*', (a big drum) and no other musical instrument. Occasionally a chorus accompanies the dancer with devotional songs. The dance begins with slow measured steps and gestures which gradually assume a greater speed and fervour as the dancer becomes more and more carried away by the fanaticism of his religious enthusiasm, until his performance comes to a sudden and dramatic climax which leaves him exhausted.

After the dance of Mahadev, is the dance of Kali. This grotesque goddess wears a mask painted blue, with much attention to the whites of the eyes. Red paint is used to denote the streams of blood issuing from the sides of the mouth, and trickling down to the chin. A *khanra*, (Bengali curved sword) is placed in the dancer's right hand. Mahadeva, dressed for his dance as *sannyasi* comes on to the arena, and lies prostrate on the ground. Kali, entering, makes a few rounds of the arena, then places one foot lightly on Mahadeva's chest, and in that position performs a few simple and rapid dance gestures. Then leaving Mahadeva she performs her own vigorous whirling dance, during which Mahadeva makes his exit. Her dance continues with a great brandishing of her avenging sword, and as

the dance proceeds the rhythm becomes more and more frenzied, and the movements of the dancer assume a wilder abandon, until the performance acquires much of the madness of the Tandava dance (Shiva's dance of grief at the death of his consort).

Another dance known to the Mymensingh masked players is the one known as Bura-Buri (old man and old woman), a duet wherein two artists, wearing masks to represent extreme age, move in rhythmic unison to the accompaniment of the rhythms of the drum. This dance depicts the joyous harmony of a long conjugal existence and the indwelling spirit of work and joy even among the aged. The dance consists of a masterful blending of humour and profundity as it relates the joys and vicissitudes of a long life.

There are other mask dances enjoying an almost equal popularity, such as the Radha-Krishna series, showing episodes from the ever-appealing romances of the divine Krishna and his consort Radha; the Hara-Parvati dances, also depicting a divine romance, namely, that of Shiva and Shakti; the Ganga dance, a choreographic description of the river Ganges in all its moods and seasons.

A dance which is not so commonly seen these days, but which seems to have been very popular until about thirty or forty years ago is the "Khemta". This too is a

devotional dance. It is usually danced by one or more women of the professional dancing-girl class. When there are two or more than two, they may dance together, but more often one dances while the others stand apart and watch, replacing her one by one until all have taken their turns.

Formerly this dance was very popular in the celebration of births and marriages; and sometimes it was also performed at such festivals as Durga Puja and Dol Jatra. The main places for these performances in the days when they were in vogue, were the courtyards of the houses of big zemindars (the rich landholder class), *Barwaritolas* (central open green in a village or quarter of a town), and *Natmandirs* (dancing halls or courtyards attached to the temples). The songs which accompany the dances are those relating the loves of Krishna and Radha; but in its decline the dance became very erotic and so gradually fell into general disrepute. At present it is slowly receding into oblivion and, is rarely to be seen.

In this kind of dance, the most intricate footwork wove into the dance complicated and delightful patterns. The movement of the feet required great agility and long practice. The dancers also brought into play their eyes, as much as any other part of the body, and much movement of the hips which required skilful muscle control in order to convey an impression of effortless balance.

The dancing girls wore for these performances richly ornamented saris costing up to several hundred rupees, and also adorned themselves with gold ornaments of great value, which included bangles, necklaces, earrings, and the '*sinthi*', a gold pendant worn across the brow, and supported across the head by a gold chain.

The orchestra consisted of a set of *tablas*, (a highly-evolved type of drum requiring much skill on the part of the drummer), and two *sarangis* (a multi-stringed instrument). Another feature of the decadence of this form of dance was the introduction into the orchestra of the harmonium.

The famous 'Jatra' is rather an operatic than a dance performance, which is staged nowadays either in the courtyards of zamindars' houses or in the open greens of villages. Formerly it belonged to the Natmandirs.

The word 'Jatra' means 'Journey', but in the course of time the dance dramas themselves have become known as Jatras. The name must have arisen from the fact that the shows are enacted by travelling players; or else from the fact that the themes of the dramas constitute a form of pilgrimage through the lives of the divine beings about whom they are centred.

In Bengal, the stories of the plays are always from the Krishna-Lila, boys taking the parts of the females in the stories; the *gopikas* (female attendants of Radhika) and Radha. Jatra not only prevails throughout Bengal, but

in many other parts of India too. Everywhere some form of Jatra exists, known under varying names, such as Ram-Lila in the United Provinces. In some provinces, but not in Bengal, themes from the Ramayana are preferred to the Krishna-Lila. Formerly, the Ramayana provided the popular subjects for the Jatra shows of Bengal too, but with the advent of Sri Chaitanya Deva, ardent apostle of Krishna, the Krishna-Lila became the most acceptable source of subject matter for the dramas to the able followers of the Krishna cult.

The main factor in these performances is not the dancing itself, but the acting and melodious singing with incidental dances by the *gopikas* and *sakhis* (female friends). During recent years, the actors have had opportunities to see the Krishna dances of the theatrical stages of Calcutta, and are trying to imitate these and introduce them into their purely rural art, so that the true Jatra is gradually becoming less practised in favour of a more sophisticated version of itself.

The originator of the Jatra as it is known in Bengal, Chaitanya Deva, used to sing and dance in ecstasy, inspired by the sacred lyrics dedicated to Krishna, so that after him, writers of songs sprang up in great numbers who used to treat the Krishna-Lila in dramatic verse, and these poems were acted. Among these poets mention should be made of Lochan Das (1523-1589), Jagganath Vallabh, and Jadunandan Das, (1607); while

among famous dramas there are the '*Vidagdhamadhava*' by Rupagoswami, translated into Bengali as '*Radha-Krishna-Lilakadamba*', and Prem Das's "*Chaitanya Chandrodaya Kaumudi*" (1712). These poets were followed by dramatists who wrote short plays in prose, and these too were staged and became very popular throughout the country. Some of the most popular themes in these dramas were Kaliya-Daman, or the killing of the demon-serpent by Krishna, and Nimayi Sannyasa, or pacification of Radha.

The performance of these dramas is accompanied by an orchestra made up of a *dhol* (drum) and a chorus of singers, dressed in their peculiar long white robes known as 'choga'. Recently, the violin and flute have been added to this, and also unfortunately, the ubiquitous harmonium.

A troupe of Jatra players is always under the management of one who is known as the 'adhikari'. The first manager traceable is Paramananda of Birbhum, who lived in the latter part of the eighteenth century. After him came Shridam Subal, who became greatly enamoured by his audiences on account of his songs relating to 'Aqrur sangabad' and 'Nimayi Sannyasa'. He was followed by a long succession of managers none of whose names have been lost right up to the present day.

The 'Kirtan' dance is perhaps the most widely practised of all the folk-dances in Bengal. It is of great

antiquity, and is associated with the worship of Vishnu, but it was the great religious revivalist, Chaitanya Deva, who gave it its present character. Perhaps the most striking feature of 'kirtan' is its democratic note for the people of a whole village, rich and poor, young and old, zamindar and tenant, freely join in it without any distinction of caste or rank. The dance is performed to the accompaniment of the 'khol' (a rural drum) and the general form of the whole dance is extremely simple since it consists of the devotees moving round in a circle raising and lowering their hands in time with the beating of the drum. It is, however, a dance of great spiritual fervour in which the religious emotions of the dancers are worked up to fanatical pitch, so that the dance usually ends in a sort of ecstasy of feeling. Occasionally the form of the dance is varied by its being taken as a procession through the village. This is called 'Nagar-Kirtan'

The 'Incense' dance and the 'Avatar' dance of Faridpur are typical of the ritual dances connected with the "Charak-Ghambira" festival, which is celebrated at the end of the Bengali year.

The incense dance probably had its origin in some occult rites which have since been forgotten. Each dancer holds in one hand an earthen incense burner, containing glowing charcoal, into which he flings a handful of incense each time the movement of the dance

brings him past the extended hand of one who stands outside the ring of dancers holding a plentiful supply of this necessity. As the incense is hurled by the dancers one after another into the censers, the fire and smoke leap up with sudden vigour, and on a dark night this dance is almost spectacular performance, as the figures of the dancers spring suddenly into vivid life at each spasmodic burst of light.

There are no songs to accompany this dance, and no instruments other than the drum.

After the ritual burning of the incense, the dancers join hands and leap around in a circle for some time to terminate the performance.

The Avatar dance depicts the ten Avatars or incarnations of Vishnu, and is comprised of great variety of mimetic gestures and symbolic actions by which the different incarnations are described. It is performed to the accompaniment of drums, and is interspersed with the incantations of 'mantras' (literally prayers) uttered by the principal dancer or 'bala' as he is called.

A brata form of ritual dance is performed by women of respectable, good-class Hindu families in the village of Rajghat in the Jessor district. According to the late Mr. Dutt :"In a place called Buna not far from the village is an ancient temple of the goddess |Sitala, (the goddess who is believed to avert small-pox). Under the spreading banyan tree close by the temple is a place known as Sitala

Tala or the abode of Sitala. Hindu women of all ages and castes, from about sixty or seventy villages in the vicinity, come to this spot to offer Puja (ritual worship) to the goddess. The women make 'manat,' or a vow promising puja to the goddess to invoke her aid in averting small-pox, overcoming barrenness, or various other desirable objectives."

Three, five or seven days before the Puja, the preceding ceremonies begin in the house of the woman who has taken the vow, she herself observing a strict fast on that day. All the adult women of the village are invited to attend this occasion. After they have assembled, they go in procession to the bathing ghat at the water's edge, uttering as they go, cries of "Ulu," the traditional community yell practised by Hindu women of all classes in Bengal on all ceremonial occasions. Arrived at the ghat, she who has made the vow, places a brass pot on a small winnowing tray (*kula*), and entering the water with this on her head, completely immerses herself. Having completed the ceremonial bath, she and her escort return to her house, she all the time carrying the now consecrated pot on her head. On reaching home she places the pot in the appointed place in her house, and her companions remain before it all night, keeping vigil and singing together religious songs, with no instrumental accompaniment, the first of the songs always being the 'Bandana,' or invocation.

On the days following this ceremony, the women go in procession from house to house throughout the village with the consecrated pot on its kula. At each house they have to beg for gifts of rice or money, with the help of which the contemplated puja will be accomplished in a befitting manner. As the procession enters each house in the village, the lady of the house spreads out the ceremonial cloth (*asan*) on the floor of her courtyard. The *kula* with the sacred pot on it is placed on the centre of the *asan*, and the processionists perform solemn dances round it to the accompaniment of the '*dhak*,' a drum played by a man of the Rishi caste (professional drummers of a very low caste). Thus the worshippers dance in each house of the neighbourhood, for three, five or seven days, according as has been promised to the goddess, after which they proceed to the shrine of Sitala, and offer the promised puja.

Although performed in connection with solemn rites, all the dances performed in the household courtyards are not of a ritualistic nature, though many of them undoubtedly bear traces of a ritualistic origin. During the course of time, where all arts are handed down traditionally from one generation to the next, there has inevitably been much change in the form and atmosphere of the original dances. Indeed, many of the dances now are no more than a spontaneous expression of the joy of living, through their mimetic representations of the

scenes and incidents of the village life so familiar to the performers. Some are even of a distinctly humorous tone.

The dancers, in ring formation, move slowly round with very little foot-work, but a great variety of movement in the gestures of the hands and arms. Among the women of the upper classes, the movements of the dance are generally speaking, much more restrained and gentle than among the ordinary peasant women, and except when the dancing is performed as the procession moves from place to place, the feet are hardly ever lifted entirely off the ground. Although the foot-work is in itself somewhat monotonous, it lends a peculiar dignity and solemnity to the dance, especially as the movements of the upper part of the body are undoubtedly of extreme grace and beauty.

The 'Madol Puja' or drum worship, is an interesting spectacle which has somehow become part of the wedding ceremony in some parts of Bengal, even among Brahmin families. The dhak, dhol, or madol, though played by men of the depressed classes, is held in high spiritual esteem as embodying the spirit of divine rhythm. During the Madol Puja, the drum, held by the drummer is venerated by offerings of flowers from a *kula*, to the accompaniment of the Madol Puja dance. Broadly speaking, the dances of secular or semi-secular functions, such as weddings are performed to the accompaniment

of 'dhol' or 'Madol', whereas, for solemn ritual occasions, the 'dhak', a much larger drum, of heavier tone, is played.

In Western Bengal, folk-dancing among women of the higher castes has almost disappeared, and survives now only in the 'Bhajo' dances, performed by unmarried girls during the month of Bhadra, in connection with the autumn devotions to the god, Indra. In the eastern parts of the provinces, however, there have been fewer sophisticating influences, and the higher castes in these districts have not forgotten the simple joys that form integral part of their cultural background.

Although most of the dances of Bengal survive either as parts of a religious ceremony, or in connection with the festivities that accompany religious ceremonies, there are a few dances which exist solely as expressions of the natural enjoyment of rhythmic movement, which is an essential chracteristic of the people of this country. Of such a kind are the 'Baul' song and dance performances, which prevail through the entire length and breadth of Bengal among the Hindu communities. The dances are performed either as solos or group efforts, to the accompaniment of many simple stringed-instruments and drums. The most striking feature of the dancing is the reckless atmosphere of joyous abandonment which pervades it, and which is in complete accordance with the sentiments of the gay little songs, to which the dances

are an accompaniment. Baul dancing and singing are connected with no particular season or festivity, but can be performed at any time, and exist purely for the self-gratification of the dancers themselves, although there are wandering bands of dancers who make a living out of giving their repertoire in the courtyards of private houses, or on village greens, for the incidental diversion of the inhabitants who are prepared to engage them for an hour or so.

One or two dances found among the simpler folk of Bengal have been handed down from a more blood-thirsty past, and are of a definitely warlike character. Among these is 'Raibeshe,' performed by men only, and found in the western regions of Birbhum, Burdwan, and Murshidabad. The performers belong to the Bauris, Domes and other depressed castes of the Hindu community. A '*kansi*' (small gong) helps to supply the rhythm in conjunction with the 'dhol.' The dancers themselves wear brass anklets called 'nupurs' on the right ankle, to augment this primitive form of orchestra. The Raibeshe dance is one of the most manly and vigorous of all the folk-dances. It is frequently punctuated by wild yells of warlike excitement, which accompany gestures suggestive of the drawing of the bow, the hurling of spears and brandishing of knives. At times the dancers advance in a crouched position towards the centre of the ring, alternately joining and extending the bended

knees, in imitation of the movement of hunters on horseback. At other times, the dancers form pairs, and one bears his partner aloft on his shoulder and in this position each performs in harmony, similar movements of the hands and arms, the upper partner alone being able to perform the head movements of the dance, and the lower one supplying the foot-work. This is a performance that requires high acrobatic skill, and assiduous practice before the dances can be rendered with the remarkable valour, and artistic grace for which they are renowned.

The 'Dhali' dance of Jessore and Khulna is another martial dance. It is performed with wooden swords and shields, to the accompaniment of 'dhol' and 'kansi' (drum and gong). The movements of the hands and arms, as well as the foot-work are extremely agile and vigorous, and the dance contains interludes in the form of mock fights with lathis, or poles, as well as with sword and shield.

The 'Kathi' dance is a survival of a long dead aggressiveness, but has lost most of its pristine character, being today performed for the amusement of the dancers themselves and a village audience, to the accompaniment of songs which commemorate not the lusts of battle, but the daily occupations of rustic life. It belongs exclusively to the members of the lower castes, and the form of the dance is mainly a skilful exposition of rhythmic

foot-work, accompanied by the beating of sticks held in the hands of the performers. The rhythm is kept up without any break for long periods during which there are numerous patterns threaded by the feet of the dancers roughly following the outline of a circle, which from time to time is broken and re-formed as the dancers form pairs first with their left-hand neighbours, and then with those on their right; while the clicking of the sticks never loses its very definite rhythm, and the feet of the dancers keep strictly to the timing set by the sticks. There are many diversions to this dance, of which the most interesting is that in which one of the players steps out from the ranks of his companions and throwing himself supine in the centre of the circle, continues to dance round and round in that position, without ever missing a beat either of his feet or sticks. These sticks are thought to be vestiges of the weapons with which the dance was erstwhile performed and the one who lies in the centre was undoubtedly the unfortunate victim of the tribes' wrath.

Among the primitive tribal peoples inhabiting the Bankura district, dancing has a foremost place in their simple forms of pastime. Generally, but not invariably, only the women and girls dance, and the men provide the musical accompaniment. The women range themselves in a circle, sometimes two or three rows deep, half facing the centre, where the men stand beating the drums

('nagara') to make time for the dancers, who move round the circle with slow and graceful steps, sometimes advancing and then retiring. The dance is a harmless and even pretty pastime in itself, but unfortunately, the participants have made its performance the occasion of much drinking and license. During the dance, the women now and then break forth into a weird plaintive chant, somewhat startling when heard for the first time, but not at all unpleasant. All the music of the Santhal and kindred tribes, of which these people are one, strikes the stranger as some sort of wailing funeral dirge, but when one gets accustomed to it, one realises that it has a very real fascination of its own.

The Mohammedans of almost every district of rural Bengal have incorporated dancing into their great mourning period of Moharrum as part of the ceremonies which express their grief. Mymensingh is the place most faced for the enthusiasm of its Moharrum dancers, and the principal dances are those called 'Marcia' and 'Jari' (meaning mourning). The dancers form themselves into a ring, and holding up the flowing skirts of their dhoties in one hand, and waving scarlet pieces of cloth in the other, they move round stamping out a rhythm with the aid of the bell-anklets worn on the ankles, to the tune of songs led by the precentor of the group, who stands outside the ring of the performers and intones the dirges relating the tragic events on the battlefield

of Kerbala, when the brothers Hassan and Hussein met their untimely ends.

Apart from these dances which take place during Moharrum, there seems to be little attraction in this form of expression among most Mohammedan communities. The life and energy of the dance seem to be derived almost entirely from incidents in the colourful lives of the Hindu heroes and gods, whose festivals are celebrated in great number throughout the Hindu year, or from the incidents of the peasants' own lives, lived so close to Nature, and so dependent on her moods.

CHAPTER VI

THE PUNJAB, SINDH AND BALUCHISTAN

An account of the folk-dancing of the Punjab is inextricably bound up with the pageantry of the religious festivals of the Kulu Valley. Throughout the summer, from mid-May till mid-October there is an unbroken succession of fairs throughout the upper valleys of the Punjab rivers; and these, since they embrace the whole ambit of the religious and social life of the region, are the only occasions when the hard-working agricultural population can express itself in dance and song.

The fairs are held in honour of the local gods, exacting deities who demand endless propitiation from their devotees, through the agency of their grasping attendant priests; hence the necessity to fête them during the harvest season.

The presiding deity of the whole Kulu Valley is Raghunath, a form of Vishnu and at the end of the summer the greatest fair of all is held to pay homage to Raghunath. This coincides with the Hindu holy season of Dassera, and is celebrated with all the splendour available to these simple people during the ten days of its duration. At this time, when the whole population

is anxious to please its mightiest deity, the minor *deotas* (gods) from every village and hamlet, who have already received their annual homage in the local fairs are brought to the great Dassera festival held in the ancient capital of Sultanpur, to pay their individual homage to the most terrible of all the gods who control the destinies of the people in these upland valleys.

Nearly every hamlet has at least one fair during the summer, and as the arrangements for these seem to be made with some care, no two villages hold their festivities on the same days, and there is always a fair in progress somewhere.

At about the middle of May, when the wheat and barley is ready for the sickle, and the young rice is sufficiently strong to be planted out in the fields in the lower areas the idol is carried out of his temple by the attendant priests, and is borne to the village green, accompanied by a band of musicians blaring forth their somewhat uncouth music from trumpets, aided by drums and cymbals. On the green, the idol is often awaited by a few guest idols from neighbouring villages, each with its own escort of attendants, worshippers and musicians.

All the people are dressed in their best, and gaily decorated with flowers ; shopkeepers set up stalls for the sale of sweetmeats, toys and endless knick-knacks; and somewhere in the background can be found the tents where 'lugri,' the locally distilled spirit can be procured.

No important commerce is carried on at any of these little fairs, except the one at Banjar, which forms a market for the sale of sheep and goats. This is attended by butchers from as far away as Simla, and by Garhwalas who wish to buy the sturdy goats as pack animals.

At the appointed time, the *deota* himself, surrounded by his retinue, dances oscillated up and down in his chair by his carriers, who are supposed to be animated only by the volition of the god; and sometimes one of his guest *deotas* dances alongside him, the pair exchanging grotesque bows and salutations, as they proceed along their way. The men in the crowd become wildly excited at this manifestation of the presence of their deity, and joining hands, they form a ring about the idol and his attendants, dancing, and shouting the words of the hymns which the musicians are playing on their instruments. Faster and wilder grows the dance as evening approaches, fresh dancers always being available to replace those who collapse from exhaustion, and the revel continues till nightfall, when the idol is returned to his shrine. The women with their gay head-dresses form a bright background to this spectacle, as they watch from the surrounding hill-slopes, terraced into stone tiers for the accommodation of spectators. The women rarely join in the dancing, but in some few villages they may form a separate ring from the men and dance or even in some

more remote places, they join their men-folk and dance in the same ring with them.

Everywhere, however, it is only the Brahmins and Kanats who are admitted to the privileged circle of dancers, low-caste people being strictly excluded, and sometimes outsiders, even of the higher castes, if not worshippers of the god, are not even allowed upon the green.

The god can, if necessary, be invoked on occasions other than these general ones. Thus at reaping time, if an agriculturist has misgivings about the bounty of his crop, the *deota* is brought to the field before the last load of corn is cut, and is danced as at the fairs. This ensures a good return of grain. The farmer rewards the god by feasting his attendants, without which, the whole ceremony would unfortunately, be invalid.

When the little fairs are all over, then comes the time for the great parade of all the *deotas* at the Dassera fair in Kulu, in honour of the greatest of all hill gods, Raghunath. In olden days, the *deotas* were brought in at the express command of the ruler, who seems to have had the same absolute sway over the local gods as he had over his subjects; and this subservience of religion to the secular power still continues in the neighbouring State of Mandi. Doubtless this subjection was originally based on the fact that the temples derived their income from land endowments held at the king's pleasure.

The revenue of about one seventh of the cultivated area of the Kulu Valley was alienated in this manner; but now that the land is held at the pleasure of an unbelieving foreign power, the *deotas* can dare to be a little less scrupulous about paying their annual homage to Raghunath, especially if the Dassera festival chances to fall at a time which coincides with harvesting operations in the surrounding districts.

The Dassera festival, however, by no means lacks its swarms of devotees, amusement-seekers and pilgrims, pouring in from all sides, for days before the festival is officially due to commence, accompanying local deities with all the pomp available in the form of banners, trumpets and drums, and gaily coloured festal attire.

On arrival at the plain near the town, encampments are formed, and almost at once adherents of various shrines form processions to parade their *deota* in all his magnificence, as a preliminary spectacle and a foretaste of what will be seen when the actual celebrations begin in earnest. Meanwhile the attendants of Raghunath himself have not been idle, and have prepared the sacred car which is to take the god out on his state procession, by decorating it with coloured cloths and flowers, and providing it with the wheels which are removed each year after the festivities are over, when the car is left out on the open plain until again required.

At the beginning of the ceremonies, the idol is brought out from the Raghunath temple and enthroned on its car. All the minor deities are brought with every possible show of pomp and music, and arranged round the central figure. Then the high priest steps out in front, and prays aloud, sprinkling water before the throne of the idol after which the leading men of Kulu pace three rapid circuits about the sacred car amid the incessant braying of the trumpets, and beating of cymbals and drums. Stout ropes are next attached to the lower timbers of the car, by which it is drawn along by hundreds of willing hands, while numbers of village idols with their enthusiastic crowds of adherents precede and surround the triumphal car on its ritual procession to the large decorated tent that awaits the occupation of the god for the five days of his *puja*.

During the next three days the *deotas* pay visits to one another and receive the homage of their devotees. The large green is covered with the circles of fanatical dancers, while the groups of brightly-dressed women look on. Towards dusk when all the gods are worshipped together, to the usual noisy accompaniment of drum and trumpet, the din is immense. Nor does night bring respite, for the broad harvest moon diffuses its clear soft radiance, in which the Sarajis, best and most indefatigable of dancers, carry on even after all the *deotas* have retired for the night. It is not till the small hours

that the crowd gradually disperses, and the plain becomes dotted with sleeping figures, wrapped in their homespun blankets upon the hard ground, with no roof but the stars.

On the last day of the fair the triumphal car of Raghunath is again brought forth to carry the idol to the crest of the steep bank overlooking the Beas River, from where excited crowds witness the decapitation of a buffalo, and various smaller animals, including a crab, down on the margin of the river ; and after this sacrifice, a figure representing Lanka is beheaded to celebrate the victory of Raghunath over the personification of Evil. Then the car is dragged back across the plain to as near the bank of the Sarvari stream as possible, across which the idol is carried in a pretty little wooden palanquin to his temple in the palace of the old Rajas. By an early hour the next morning, all the *deotas* and their followers have dispersed to their hamlets.

When the fair falls as late as the middle of October, great additional interest is lent to it by the caravans of picturesquely clad Yarkandis and Ladakis, who are on their long journeys from Central Asia with ponies, silks and carpets for sale in the plains of India.

The god Raghunath is fêted on one other occasion in the year, that of the Pipal Jatra celebrations, when he is brought out from his temple to be bathed in the Beas River, the attendance at this festival, though numerous,

is very much less than at the Dassera Fair, but is celebrated with the same reckless abandonment of the god's followers to singing and dancing in his honour.

Chief of the other religious festivals celebrated during the winter and spring in Kulu, is the Koli-ri-Diwali, when the image of the *deota*, is not as a rule, produced. This feast does not seem to have any connection with the Diwali festival of the plains, and is celebrated not in November as is the better-known Diwali, but at the end of December. During the evenings preceding it, the men of each village congregate on their village green to sing and dance until a late hour, when a chorus in praise of the goddess, Devi Hirma is shouted, and then with cheers and great acclamations, all disperse to their homes.

During the singing, the men dance slowly in a circle, occasionally breaking into a wild and sudden gallop, each tugging his neighbour towards the inside or the outside of the ring until some one gets exhausted, and lets go, with the resultant collapse of that particular number. This is an extremely crude and primitive form of dance celebration, but whether they have a highly developed sense of the art or not, the inhabitants of these valleys seem to possess a natural urge which impels them to express themselves in dancing. On the evening of this festival of lights, all the houses are illuminated with lamps and torches through every hamlet up and

down the Beas valley, and the effect of these twinkling myriads of little lights, up and down the expanses of the black mountain sides, is one of great beauty. The signal for the lighting of the lamps is given from the walls of the old castle at Naggar, the most prominent landmark of the valley, and from here it is caught up at once by the nearby villagers, and flashed on, up and down the slopes and gullies till the whole night is adorned by its sparkling loveliness.

The only other dances of a ritual nature that occur in this region are those performed every year at Len, the capital of Ladakh, and the highest city in the world, being thirteen thousand feet above sea level. These dances are the famous masked devil dances of the Buddhist monks, who come out from the fastnesses of their mountain monasteries to exorcise the evil spirits afflicting their followers in the magic ritual of these dances. The weird beauty of these dances is of such fame that every year, numbers of tourists deem it worthwhile to make the long trek from Kashmir, through snow-bound mountain passes and over great tracts of almost uninhabited highland to witness these dances for the few days of their duration at Leh, in the month of June.

In the lowlands of the Punjab, professional dancing girls are much in demand on all social occasions for the entertainment of guests; and their dancing is enjoyed for its own sake and not, as elsewhere, as a ritual observance

in connection with some religious celebration. Of course, the people of the villages are not all so sophisticated that they do not themselves ever care to take an active part in dance entertainments among themselves; and there are many popular romantic ballads, the themes of which provide material for both song and dance, as the peasants enact in dance the tragic tale of legendary lovers being poured forth upon their ears by the lamentations of the musicians.

Of the stories most in vogue among the agricultural population, the favourites are the ballads 'Mirza Sahib ki Sur' and 'Waris Shah ki Hir.' The first describes the ill-fated love of the noble and handsome Mirza for a Jat Mussalmani girl, Sahiba. The parents of these two, had no intention of allowing the course of true love to run smooth; and when the young lovers ran away together, they were pursued and put to death. Well told, this story has a deep emotional effect on the easily-swayed hearts of the audience, and its recital forms part of nearly every festive gathering. The second story is very similar, as are all the great love stories of folk-lore all the world over; and describes the love of Hir and Ranjha. The parents of Ranjha, not approving of her choice, married her against her will to another man, from whom, after much suffering, she eventually contrived to run away and rejoin her never-forgotten hero, Hir. It has often been asserted that the people of the Punjab are a race

without compassion or tenderness, but the very popularity of these romantic legends is sufficient to give the lie to such a statement.

In the villages of Patiala State, the hiring of professional dancers and singers is the most common form of social entertainment. Those found in the towns are often very proficient exponents of their art, the musicians here being the Rababis, that is, those who perform upon the Rabab, an exquisitely toned stringed-instrument, invented by the most famous musician of all time Tan Sen, who lived and worked at the court of Akbar.

At weddings in the Muzzaffargarh district, the dance called 'Jhummir' is a great favourite. Its performances are not strictly relegated to these occasions only, for with variations it is danced anywhere and at any time when numbers of people are gathered together for any form of celebration whatsoever. There are three main types of 'Jhummir,' each of which has a different mood, and is therefore suited to different occasions, by reason of its predominating mood. It is a simple dance based on the usual circle, and accompanied by musicians and the clapping of the hands of the dancers themselves. The time patters though not the movements of the dance, have developed some intricacy; and by virtue of these, a man is lightly esteemed if he cannot acquit himself well at a 'Jhummir' performance. The girls even have a line or so of doggerel with which to jeer at those who are too

clumsy to cut an agile figure in the 'Jhummir' dance. It runs—

> "Na Jhummir na tari
> Na ajai mukh te darhi"

which means more or less "You cannot dance jhummir, nor clap your hands. You cannot even grow a beard on your face." Although these 'Jhummir' dances are now so well known in the Punjab, they are Baluchi in origin and the Baluchi camel-drivers are even now great exponents of them.

The Khattak community perform large-scale dances of a warlike nature around bonfires. Sometimes as many as two hundred men take part in a performance, and these may include even the dignified elders from Pathan villages, yelling at the tops of their voices, and abandoning themselves to the wild fury of the dance. This reaches such a pitch that the piper and drummer who provide the music, themselves join the dancing, playing their instruments at the same time. The drummer is considered the most important factor in the success or otherwise of a Khattak dance party, and the performers often refuse to dance if they consider the drummer insufficiently skilled in the reproduction of the intricate and high speed rhythms required by their dances. The dances resolve themselves into duets of sword play, which in turn give way to a furious brandishing and twirling of weapons, performed with a great display of skill, not

unworthy of comparison with a display of fencing; then the partners fall back into the general circle of the dancers and whirl and spin about their bonfire which is constantly fed with fresh supplies of wood and oil, and throws a lurid glare over the dynamic scene. In the intervals of the dance, intervals necessitated by the extreme expenditure of energy demanded in its performance, individual dancers come forward into the circle, and give a display of most dexterous feats of sword play, the result of long years of assiduous practice. A Khattak dance party is the preliminary to a feast, at which sheep and goats are slaughtered, and the mutton is roasted whole and eaten on the scene of the festivities.

In the hill State of Chamba, dancing is a favourite pastime among the agricultural inhabitants of these upland valleys. These dances are danced for their own sake, not being dependent for their performance on any religious feast or seasonal celebration. Men and women never dance together, but each sex has its own set of dances, those of the women being known as "Ghorai." In these the women form two circles, round which they dance, with slow graceful gestures, swaying the body half-way round to the left or right at each step in an easy manner, raising the arms alternately above the head, or sweeping them towards the ground with sinuous movements of the wrists and fingers. The dancers accompany themselves with songs, sometimes lyrical, sometimes a

metrical setting to some old legend. The two groups sing alternately, the second repeating the words of the first group.

The dancing of the men has not the same grace, being vigorous, and often even boisterous in character. Sometimes a dancer continues to spin wildly round and round, regardless of the form of the dance, until from sheer fatigue and giddiness he falls to the ground. At all the village fairs, dancing is an essential part of the procedure, and among the men this often means the consumption of much village distilled liquor, which further detracts from the dignity of the entertainment. The townspeople of Chamba do not indulge in any form of dancing, and tend to regard it as a decadent pastime unfit for any but the least cultured of village folk.

There are many other dances found throughout the villages of the Punjab, differing little from each other, and none of them having attained any high degree of development. They are the simple expression of a simple peasantry, and consist of the usual variations of the basic pattern in which men or women dance round a circle, either clapping the hands, stamping the feet, or accompanying themselves with the singing of local legends set to an easy melody. Among these are those known as "Dhris," "Sammi," "Lodhi," "Bhangra" and "Dhamal." They are danced at fairs, weddings, and for no reason at all, any evening on any village green, where a few

joyful-spirited youths or maidens chance to have gathered together.

Among the inhabitants of Sindh, the performances at private houses of professional dancing women is much patronised, even as it was in the days when the Amirs kept their lavish and extravagant court there. Now-a-days, however, this form of entertainment seems to hold greater popularity among the Mussalman population than among the Hindus. The Sindhi dancing women, though belonging to the courtesan class, are strikingly good-looking, and any large party is considered incomplete without an exhibition of their talent. In the days when the Amirs held sway over this desert province, their durbars were attended by the rough, unpolished crowds of Pathan and Baluchi chieftains, and there is a tradition today in the bazaars of Hyderabad, the erst-while capital, that at these durbars, the exquisite dancing of these women, and the lilting notes of the Persian lyrics which they sang, so enchanted all present, that court etiquette was completely forgotten, and with no respect for the princely presence, the swaggering Pathans, and the rough truculent Baluchis, and even armed retainers of the royal househood all jostled each other as they thronged for positions in the Hall of Audience, from where they could better enjoy the performance.

It is the descendants of these enchantresses who comprise the body of Sindh's dancers today, and although

there are no longer royal courts to patronise them, they are still able to accumulate great wealth from the patronage of the rich landed aristocracy at whose social functions they still dance with undiminished grace and delicacy.

Among the Hindus of upper Sindh, Bhagat performances are also immensely popular. At these, members of the Bania community dance and sing religious songs, to the beating of drums, never tiring for hours as they go through hymn after hymn, in honour of their gods.

The Baluchis, still largely nomadic, and knowing nothing of intellectual joys, are extremely fond of the dance as a form of pastime wherever they come together in large numbers on any festive occasion. Their dances are necessarily purely social or warlike in character, as these people have little cultural background to provide a rich deposit of myth and legend from which to draw themes for dance dramas, and since they are a Mussalman race, they have not, like the Hindu peasantry, a huge pantheon of divine heroes and gods, whose multifarious activities can be recalled in song and dance celebrations. These facts have certainly restricted the development of the art into anything comparable with the dance forms of other provinces, particularly in the South, where the dance of the people, fed by the rich store of religious myth and legend of an ancient race, little influenced by outside forces, has given not only the dance dramas of

the Kathakali type, but has led to the development of the highly stylised and intricate symbolism of the classical Bharata Natya.

Meanwhile, however, the Baluchi, innocent of these considerations and any awareness of his own limitations, has continued through the ages to throw himself wholeheartedly into the enjoyment of pure movement, movement performed for its own sake, and enhanced by the rhythms set by drum and cymbal, sometimes accompanied by song, sometimes merely by the clapping of the hands of the dancers. At wedding parties the Jhummir dances already described are almost always performed. This is perhaps the only dance existing among the Baluchis calling for skill of any kind in its executions.

Among some sections of the community, it used to be the custom for men and women to dance together, but about twelve years ago the Mullahs pronounced the practice to be unlawful, and ascribed to it an earthquake that occurred at that time. Since then mixed dancing is very rare.

In the State of Las Bela, the favourite form of dance is a survival of some old war dance in which the original weapons have been long since replaced by sticks. These are beaten together with a great deal of shouting and stamping, as forty or fifty burly tribesmen revolve in a great circle about two drummers and a piper who form their orchestra.

CHAPTER VII

THE UNITED PROVINCES

Brata or ritual dances prevail throughout this province among the women of every village. These are sometimes connected with the ceremonies attendant on the great *puja* days, or even at some private rite of invocation, but more generally they are performed during those rites by which the exorcision of disease-bringing deities is effected. Most of the major epidemic diseases known to the villager in the tropics have their presiding deities, and when there is imminent danger of an area being affected, the women gather to offer sacrifice and prayer to the deity involved, after which they perform the ritual dances which are supposed to propitiate the malevolent intent of the goddess, and thereby avert the threatened scourge. The *Shitala puja* has already been mentioned in connection with the similar performance found among the women of Bengal, Shitala being the goddess who presides over small-pox. At the *puja* ceremony, the women loosen their hair, and with flowing tresses, dance around the shrine, wailing the chorus—

"*Jhabar jhulé Kali ke,*
Jai Sammaya Mai ke."

This is probably the result of some urge, which impels an ignorant peasantry to strive to cope in some way, with a terror which they, with their lack of knowledge even of the elementary principles of hygiene, are powerless to control or lessen.

All along the banks of the river Jumna, sacred to the memory of the cowherd god, Krishna, one meets with a wealth of folk-dance which commemorates in song and movement the most popular theme in all Hinduism, the divine love of Krishna and Radha, and the legends connected with the childhood and youth of the god among the shepherds and '*gopikas*' (shepherdesses). Mathura and Brindaban are the places where these celebrations of the devotees of Krishna reach their greatest intensity, and therefore their highest development. The most well-known dances are those of the Rasa-Lila series, known wherever Krishna is worshipped. These are all depictions of the playtime of the hero's youth and early manhood, and the dances are well developed in the sense that the movement is complex, and the miming has reached a high degree of artistry and technical skill. On account of the popularity of these performances, the traditional instruments of the orchestra are gradually being ousted by a set of tablas, (drums requiring much skill and musical knowledge to be played at all well) and the ubiquitous harmonium, which has unfortunately gained such popularity in this country during the last

century, although it is so ill-suited to the adequate interpretation of Indian music. Much of the foot-work of these dances somewhat resembles that of the classical Kathak style of dancing, though it is, of course, necessarily less stylised and conventionalised than that to be found in classic forms.

In these districts there is also great dance activity during the holy festival of 'Holi'. These dances are mainly performed by women, and are more inclined to become dance-games than mere dances. This does not mean to say that the quality of the dancing is not of a high standard; often it is most graceful and intricate; but this 'Holi' or 'Dol-Jatra' is of its nature a joyous festival, and is celebrated with much merry-making, which involves the liberal squirting of brightly coloured water on all and sundry, and the throwing of red, yellow or green dust. The dancers, as they perform, are armed with the requisite syringes, from which they discharge their gay ammunition, and the whole atmosphere is one of light-hearted revelry.

Just after the rains break, the famous '*kajri*' dances come into season. They are performed to the accompaniment of the delightful 'Jhula' lyrics, these being swing songs. Village maidens express their joy at the end of the scorching cruel summer, by swinging and singing out of doors under the mango trees, while others of their party dance in the newly refreshed

air, half intoxicated by the smell of the rain on the wet earth, and the damp grass springing to a fresh life and greenness after the terrible months that precede the coming of the monsoon.

The professional dancing girls of this region have at their command a repertoire that is both varied and of a high standard of skill and beauty. Their technique resembles closely that of the Kathak school, and to the eyes of the uninitiated may seem to possess greater grace and lovelier posing. This is natural, for the Kathak dances are meant to be appreciated by a more cultured audience, and their appeal is to the intellect as much as the senses. The appeal of these lesser dances is of a purely sensual nature, and though lacking the spiritual element so essential to great art, is by no means primitive or vulgar.

Maud Allen, the well-known dancer saw an exhibition by some of these dancing girls, and remarked, "I thought I could dance but compared with your girls, I know nothing."

Charles Doyley gives the following account of a dancing woman of Lucknow: "It should be understood that the dance women of India pique themselves entirely on the gracefulness of their positions and motions. They have no variety of steps, the feet being kept parallel and close; one foot advancing or moving only a few inches, and the other always following it. This, however, is done with remarkable exactness as to time, which, on all

occasions, is regulated by the instruments played by men attached to the set."

Prince Victor of Cooch Behar writes: "For the most difficult feat which the nautch girls have to perform is the walk. The perfect walk is the *ne plus ultra* of the nautch, and to watch a 'nautchwali' glide effortlessly across the floor is the personification of art."

The dress of the North Indian nautchwali consists of a skirt of enormous width, which is worn gathered tightly about the narrow waist, and thence swings in wide and endless folds down to the ankles. The hem of the skirt is embroidered with rows and rows of work in gold and silver thread.

A tightly fitting and very short blouse, known as a 'choli' is worn above this, the choli being so short that there is always a gap between the waistband of the skirt and the hem of the choli. Tucked into the waist of the skirt, and thence draped about the head and shoulders is a length of filmy gauze-like material usually richly embroidered along its edges with gold and silver. This is called the 'Dopatta.' This gorgeous costume has its beauty enhanced by the quantities of jewellery worn by the dancing girls, in the form of bangles, anklets, ear-rings, necklaces, etc.

Among the simpler sections of society, are dances which are the strict property of particular castes. Thus the Ahirs (milkmen), Kahars (menials), Chamars (leather-

workers), and Pasis (scavengers) each have their own particular dances, which are not performed by members of any other caste. Of these, those of the Ahirs and Chamars have attained a higher development than any others, and contain material of much interest to the collector of folk-lore and folk-art, besides great possibilities of further development.

The Ahir dance, which has no other accompaniment, vocal or instrumental, than that of the *dholak and kansi* (drum and cymbals) has a wealth of original foot-work; which calls to mind the disciplined stepping of the fencer or sword acrobat. The dance is only performed within the Ahir community at the times of births and marriages. The performers wear a tight knicker, the rest of the body being left naked except for the adornment of armlets and necklaces. Instead of the usual anklets, bands of little brass bells are bound about the thighs, and the jingling of these adds emphasis to the time-patterns of the dance.

The dances of the Chamars are simple dramatic or operatic performances, freely interspersed with dance numbers rather than true dance performances. One may almost consider them as an early stage in the development of the comic opera. Very often, the stories, slight though they be, are based on the themes from the legends of the gods, and contain much scope for buffoonery and clowning. The somewhat coarse sense of humour

of the dialogue is not without a subtle undercurrent of clever satire; and there is always much witty punning and word-play in the repartee of the clowns. The actual dancing is performed by this lighter element in the dramatis personal.

There is one form of dance, known specifically as the buffoon's dance, or Bhanr Nautch, which was formerly in great demand among the aristocracy of the United Provinces, so much so, that a number of these buffoons were permanently employed as part of the household of the rich *nawabs* and landed gentry. There was never much in the art of these entertainers that could be considered as pure dance; it was rather a rhythmic exhibition of horse-play and foolery, with much exchange of witty repartee. This form of entertainment became so degenerate and coarse, that there was not even sufficient wit left in its dialogue to justify its further continuance, so that now-a-days one rarely, if ever, hears of it.

A dance frequently to be seen throughout the countryside and sometimes just beyond the limits of the big towns too, is the Banjara dance. The Banjaras are a nomadic tribe, who eke out an existence by peddling wild honey, roots of medicinal plants and perfumes such as '*mriganabhi*', the eṣsence extracted from the navel of a certain species of deer. Since these itinerant peoples have no permanent abode, they live in wretched tents, and while away the evening hours by dancing round their

communal bonfire to the accompaniment of the *dholak*. The women wear the *lahanga*, the beautifully swinging skirt worn so little in present-day India, the tight *choli*, or bodice, and a length of material which shrouds the head and shoulders, similar to that worn by the professional dancing girl, but of ordinary coarse material.

Wandering beggars accompanied by a little boy with a drum, often draw the attention of the less fortunate to their miserable condition by dancing at roadsides and in the gateways of private houses. Often they dance for the amusement of bands of village children if they think they can expect any reward in the form of food or money.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CENTRAL PROVINCES, CENTRAL INDIA AND RAJPUTANA

There are many types of dance entertainment extant in this region, including the primitive pastime of the aboriginal tribes, the sophisticated grace of the professional dancing girl, the seasonal festivities of the low caste Hindu communities, and the ritual performances in the temples, at the singing of the *bhajans* (religious songs).

The *bhajan* performances are not essentially dance performances, but the participants in the singing of the religious hymns become to be carried away by an emotional frenzy, always augmented by the hypnotism of the drums, that they are unable to remain still, but jump from the ground to posture and dance before the deity. This devotional fervour attains an excess of fanatical enthusiasm at the times of the great festivals, particularly among the members of the lower castes, for whom religion is less a matter of the intellect and spirit, and rather more of a conglomeration of superstitions and emotional fervours.

Diwali, the festival of lights in honour of the goddess Lakshmi, is celebrated with many singing and dancing

parties by the lower castes. The people of Betul district have a dance known as Dhandar, which they perform on the fifth day after Diwali. For this they erect a shed or pavilion, and in the shelter thus afforded, the men stand in two rows, facing each other, and move backwards, forwards and sideways, beating together two sticks to mark the timing of their movements, and singing romantic lyrics. This simple show always attracts crowds of witnesses from the surrounding hamlets, and the performance goes on during the whole night, during which time home-distilled spirit freely flows to maintain the waking energy of both performers and spectators. After the dance is over, dawn is ushered in by a display of horse-play, given by young men attired as women.

During the same festival of Diwali, the milkmen caste, the Ahirs, perform their 'Madai' dances, also of a not very reputable character. They dress up in the most gaily coloured garments available, and decorate their head-dresses with peacock feathers, and their persons with enormous quantities of ornament in the form of cowrie shell necklaces, brass armlets and anklets, made of hollow brass tubing filled with little pebbles in order that they may produce as much noise as possible. Thus attired, bands of Ahirs wander from house to house among the better class Hindus, and there dance and sing their somewhat crude songs in expectation of monetary

reward. They also visit the weekly markets held in the vicinity.

In Gwalior State, dancing and singing are the rich man's amusements, and are provided by women of the professional class, who are hired to perform in the houses of the wealthy. Very often, ordinary middle-class members of society strive to obtain the services of these sirens at the celebrations held in the family on the occasions of births and marriages; but since their fees are very high, they perform but little outside the social circle of the rich landholders and the aristocracy.

In the State of Ajmir-Merwara, the Jats hold a fair every year in the month of July to commemorate the valorous deeds of their ancient hero, Teja. Both sexes remain awake throughout the whole of the night preceding the fair, dancing and singing the praises of their deified hero and bearing to his shrine offerings of cooked rice, barley and fruits.

The village of Wardha is well known for the number of dances with which it celebrates its seasonal festivities. These are of a primitive kind, and frequently allow free play for crude burlesquing and coarse humour. In one of their dances, a man dressed as a girl, narrates while dancing, the history of a woman's life, from childhood, through adolescence, domestic tasks, and motherhood to old age. This is generally considered most

amusing according to the undeveloped number of the peasant mind.

On most festivals the inhabitants of Wardha, as they dance, take arms in a long line, moving to and fro as one of their number sings a song suitable to the occasion, the others following and beating together small sticks to mark the time and adapting their extempore movements to suit the rhythm. Among Marwaris, dancing has always been a popular pastime among the women. They have many varieties of folk-dance in their repertoire, and their activities are mostly centred in the State of Bikaner.

In this region are many of the aboriginal tribes. They too have their dances, many of which are not so primitive as may be supposed. The Gonds have a dance known as "Karma", in which both men and women take part, making rows opposite each other, while the musicians playing on a kind of drum called a 'timki' sit between them on the ground. The dance is graceful, and well regulated with measured steps, which are very correctly performed. Dancing continues throughout a whole night, watched by crowds of spectators who gather from many miles around on these occasions. While they dance, the performers sing love-songs, one row answering the other, the echo of their voices floating for miles on the still night air.

The tribe of the Bhils were in olden days wont to dance ritual war dances before going into battle against

hostile neighbouring tribes. The object of these dances was to obtain success in battle by going through an imitation of a successful battle beforehand. Shadows of these dances survive today among the same people, their weapons having been replaced by sticks. Sometimes, these dances precede, with an air of ritual solemnity still, the hunting parties of the community.

A more vigorous memory of the old war dance survives among the Bhils of Gwalior State, where members of the community dance to the accompaniment of a big *dhol* (drum), ferociously brandishing pieces of wood, long sticks or bows. This dance definitely retains more of its original character than the dances of the Bhils in other districts of Central India. That there is a more tender side to the nature of the Bhil, is shown in other dances which depict romantic themes of the sometimes tragic love of a young man for some beautiful maiden. These dances are very popular among the community, and are certain evidences of the fundamentally sentimental character of an erstwhile bloodthirsty and aggressive tribe.

CHAPTER IX

GUJERAT

Gujerat is the home of the famous 'Garba' dances, performed on several occasions, varying from the Navaratra (nine-night pujas) and celebrations of the Krishna-Lila to rites connected with the invocations of sterile women at the Dwarika shrine, to which women flock from all parts of India.

There seem to be various possible explanations of the word 'garba'. In connection with the ordinary festivals, the word may be derived from one or both of two sources, (*a*) The song which is sung with these dances is known as 'garba', and would obviously lend its name to the dance with which it is associated and (*b*) the girls of Gujerat dance, carrying on their heads a white earthen pot, its sides cut out into designs of flowers, leaves, etc. The pot is called a 'garbi', the word here being a diminutive of the Sanskrit word 'ghat' meaning pot.

During the Navaratra festival when the worship of Kali and other goddesses is kept up for a period of nine nights, each household has its 'garbi' pot, kept in a place of honour, and illuminated from within by

a small wick floating in a shallow saucer of clarified butter. As the sides of the pot are cut out into attractive designs, the illuminated pot is a very pretty sight, and the procession of girls who go from house to house to perform the 'garba' dances during this festival, form a particularly pleasing spectacle since each one carries on her head an illuminated 'garbi' pot.

During the nine nights of Navaratra, the girls of the village go from house to house, bearing their 'garbis' and then make a circle about the household 'garbi'; dance and sing, led by the woman of the house, who afterwards offers specially prepared sweetmeats to her guests, sweets consecrated to the goddess in whose honour the puja is being held. Such consecrated sweets are known as 'prasad', and are a common feature of every religious festival throughout the whole country.

During the dance, the leader of the group of performers sings the first line of the 'garba' song, which is repeated by the rest in chorus, the whole song being accompanied by the movements of the ritual dance, and time being stressed by clapping their hands rhythmically on every 'tal' or beat. They bend sideways gracefully at every clap, the hands sweeping in beautifully formed gestures, upwards or downwards or to the side, in order to make the clap.

'Garba' is the ceremony in which everyone takes part, irrespective of caste, or social position. The

dances are accompanied by the beating of the 'dholak' (drum), and recently the harmonium has also been unfortunately introduced.

In Kathiawar, the Rasa dances, or Krishna-Lila dances are performed after the 'garba' style, with this difference, that men also take part in their performance. In some places, the dances have become exclusively male performances. In some of these, the rhythm is provided by the dancers themselves, who shake short sticks to the ends of which are attached bunches of small brass bells. Musicians outside the circle of dancers also provide further accompaniment with other instruments of percussion, of which there are an infinite variety.

The songs of 'garba' are often of great antiquity, having been handed down orally for innumerable generations, and since many of them are of great beauty, there is an attempt being made now, to collect them and get them written down, before they get lost or forgotten by a community which every year becomes more and more sophisticated as the result of the spread of an urban education which seems to breed in the minds of its recipients a contempt for the quaint and traditional customs of the community to which they belong.

Some years ago in the "Modern Review," there appeared a most interesting article by Mr. J.C.Roy, on the associations and origins of the 'garba' dances

of Gujerat. Mr. Roy traced the origin of the word to the Sanskrit 'garbha', which can mean either 'uterus', or the unborn child in the uterus. Since 'garba' is danced at the famous shrine at Dwarika to which sterile women are wont to make pilgrimage, it seems that the 'garba' pot may be a symbol of the uterus, and the lamp inside, a figure of the life in the uterus desired by the visitants to the shrine. Among the most orthodox in Hindu society is considered very important indeed that there should be offspring to perform the posthumous rites so necessary for the well-being of the parents' souls in the after-life. Therefore, the pilgrims to the Dwarika shrine, having made their offerings with song and dance, receive a branding on the palms of the hands from the priests of the shrine, which signifies that they have given birth to a child and are no more barren. Whether or no a child is actually born to these women at any later time, the very fact of their having performed the *puja* and received the marks on the palms of their hands, entitles them to be burnt by anyone, and this burning is as efficacious as if performed by a son.

CHAPTER X

CEYLON, THE ANDAMANS AND THE NICOBARS

Specially characteristic of the folk-dancing of South India and Ceylon, is the 'Yakkum Neutuma', the so-called devil-dance. This is performed primarily as an act of exorcism in cases of sickness and insanity. The possessing Yakshas, or demons, are summoned by the beating of drums and the highly complex gestures of the dance, and when their invocation is complete, are commanded to depart from the body of the afflicted person.

Every gesture of this violent and somewhat terrifying ritual has a special significance, and even the slightest change in the prescribed ritual would violate the efficacy of the spell. The remarkable positions of the thumb and first finger of the dancers' bejewelled right hands are particularly important.

In Ceylon, festivals are marked by the clever exhibitions of stick-dancing by the tom-tom beaters. These dance, sometimes in a crouched position, sometimes erect, in a circle about a leader who gives the timing on a pair of cymbals; while the dancers strike

their sticks in various intricate patterns against each other, or against those of their companions to the left or right.

The greatest amusement among the tribes of the Andamans, indeed their chief object in life after the chase is the whole-night dance party. The dancing itself is comprised of a curious and monotonous set of movements performed by drumming the feet in various time-patterns on a special sounding board, shaped like a Crusader's shield, and often mistaken for a shield by the casual observer, the dancers meanwhile chanting a song limited in compass to a range of four semi-tones and the intermediate quarter-tones, stressing the time by clapping their hands against the thighs in strict unison. This dance takes place any night, when there are sufficient people gathered together. At special meetings of the tribes, it becomes ceremonial, and is continued for several nights in succession, both sexes taking allotted parts in it. This and turtle-hunting are the only things in life which arouse energetic interest in the Andamanese mind.

The dance of the Nicobarese is a circular dance performed indoors, or nearby the village houses, except in the north where the villages have assembly-houses in which social functions can take place. The dancers form a chain by laying their arms across each others' backs, with the hands resting on the next person's shoulder.

Both sexes join, but in separate groups, and the dancers provide their own vocal accompaniment. There is a leader who intones the songs and directs the steps, which are variations on a pattern formed by taking a step right and then one to the left, followed by a jump in strict unison, the dancers landing low on both heels.

The Nicobarese are a musical people with clear, harmonious voices. They are adept at composing songs for special occasions particularly acrostic songs. They have a flageolet and a stringed instrument made of bamboo, on which they are able to accompany themselves.

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79